"A new and exciting chapter in the Sorcerer Supreme's life." – The Comic Book Dispatch

DOCTOR STRANGE OF ASGARD

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“Provides a unique aesthetic while retaining much of Doctor Strange’s signature charm.”
— Major Spoilers

SORCERER SUPREME NO MORE!

IN THE EPIC CLIMAX OF BLOOD HUNT, Doctor Doom tricked Doctor Strange into surrendering the title of Sorcerer Supreme. Now Doom is ruling the world, and Stephen Strange is...experiencing a bit of an identity crisis. Searching for purpose — and maybe revenge — he travels to Asgard to see whether Thor’s kingdom might be looking for a Sorcerer Supreme of its own. Loki’s willing to help — but that help comes with a wicked catch, and Strange quickly realizes that becoming Asgard’s top magical authority is going to be more complicated than he thought!

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COLLECTING ***DOCTOR STRANGE OF ASGARD* #1-5** — BY DEREK LANDY,
CARLOS MAGNO AND ESPEN GRUNDETJERN.

DOCTOR STRANGE OF ASGARD

Doctor Strange surrendered the power of Sorcerer Supreme to Doctor Doom.

Doctor Doom used the power to save the world...and then to conquer it.

Stephen Strange has been lying low since this humiliation. But you can't keep a good surgeon turned sorcerer down forever...

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DOCTOR STRANGE OF ASGARD

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ASGARD.
THE HOME OF THE GODS.
THE GOLDEN REALM.
LAND OF MYSTERY AND LEGEND.
IT COULD BE ARGUED THAT THIS IS NO PLACE FOR A *MORTAL* FROM MIDGARD, A MAN WHO HAS LOST HIS STATION. A MAN WHO HAS LOST HIS *WAY.*
A MAN WHO AIMS TO *GET IT ALL BACK.*
SO, THIS? THIS IS BUT THE FIRST STEP.
A STEP INTO A COLD, BRUTAL, ALIEN WORLD, WHERE FRIENDS ARE FEW AND FAR--

--BETWEEN.
DOCTOR STEPHEN STRANGE!
I BID YOU WELCOME TO ASGARD!
OH, IT IS GOOD TO SEE YOUR TINY FACE!

TELL ME, MY FRIEND, WHAT BRINGS YOU TO MY HOME?
I NEED A JOB, THOR.
YOU SEEK EMPLOYMENT? *HERE?*
HERE IT IS. THE SPIEL. THE PITCH.
ALL-FATHER THOR, AS SORCERER SUPREME OF MIDGARD, MY DUTY WAS TO DEFEND EARTH FROM SUPERNATURAL THREATS.
BUT THE BATTLES, THE CONFLICTS, THE VILLAINS AND MONSTERS AND DANGERS--THAT WAS ONLY EVER *PART* OF MY JOB.
I WAS ALSO EARTH'S *STEWARD.*
EVERY DAY, I WAS ENTRUSTED, BY *THE VISHANTI,* TO SOLVE A THOUSAND DIFFERENT PROBLEMS IN A THOUSAND DIFFERENT WAYS--
--ENSURING THAT THE MAGICAL AND THE MUNDANE *FLOWED TOGETHER,* THAT ONE DIDN'T *CRASH* AGAINST THE OTHER.
THERE IS A BALANCE THAT MUST BE MAINTAINED. MAGIC NEEDS TO BE DIRECTED AND PROTECTED, YES, BUT ALSO *CONTROLLED.*
ON MIDGARD, THAT BALANCE REQUIRES CONSTANT VIGILANCE. WITHIN A REALM SUCH AS ASGARD, WHERE THE VERY *STONES* ARE THREADED WITH MAGIC?
IT REQUIRES NOTHING LESS THAN A *SORCERER SUPREME.*

AND YOU WOULD SEEK THIS ROLE FOR YOURSELF, INSTEAD OF FIGHTING TO REGAIN THAT WHICH YOU HAVE LOST ON EARTH?
WHAT VICTOR VON DOOM **TOOK** FROM YOU?*
*SEE **BLOOD HUNT #5!** --ALANNA
THIS **IS** ME FIGHTING TO REGAIN WHAT I'VE LOST.
BUT I'M AWARE OF HOW FRAGILE IS THE GROUND UPON WHICH I STAND. I'M ALSO AWARE OF THE AUDACITY WITH WHICH I MAKE MY CASE.
MY ONLY REPLY IS THAT THIS **NEEDS** TO BE DONE, AND I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN DO IT.
YOU HAVE NEVER LACKED FOR **CONFIDENCE**, STEPHEN.
ASGARD HAS NEVER **HAD** A SORCERER SUPREME. WE HAVE NEVER **NEEDED** ONE.
WE HAVE HAD OUR **SKALDS**, AND THEY HAVE PERFORMED ADMIRABLY IN THE EONS SINCE ASGARD'S CREATION.
BUT YOUR LAST SKALD WAS--
I AM AWARE OF WHO OUR LAST SKALD WAS AND WHY I **BANISHED** THEM.*
OF COURSE.
*IN **IMMORTAL THOR #15!** --ALANNA
BUT WITH **LOKI** GONE, THERE IS AN ARGUMENT TO BE MADE THAT ASGARD MAY, IN FACT, **NEED** A SORCERER SUPREME. I AM NOT OPPOSED TO THE IDEA.
BUT YOU WILL NEED TO CONSULT WITH THE **SORCERESS HULDA**. SHE IS NOW ASGARD'S MAGICAL AUTHORITY. IF YOU ARE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO GARNER HER BLESSING, THEN YOU SHALL HAVE WHAT YOU SEEK.

THANK YOU, THOR.
I CAN PROMISE YOU THAT I WILL NOT SQUANDER THIS OPPORTUNITY. THAT THING WITH DOOM...
DOOM HAS MUCH IN COMMON WITH LOKI. THEY ARE BEINGS WHO HIDE BEHIND THE TRICKERY OF WORDS--
--AND AS SUCH, THEY WILL ALWAYS HAVE A PARTICULAR ADVANTAGE OVER THOSE WHO VALUE ***HONOR*** IN OUR DEALINGS.
BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN WE ***COMPROMISE***, STEPHEN. IT SIMPLY MEANS WE MUST WORK ***HARDER*** THAN THEY DO.
THERE ARE CHAMBERS FOR YOU HERE IF YOU DESIRE THEM.
THANK YOU, THOR, BUT BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN ASGARDIAN AND MIDGARDIAN MAGIC WILL REQUIRE ME TO GET MY HANDS DIRTY--
--AND I DOUBT I'LL BE ABLE TO DO THAT WHILE LIVING IN A ***PALACE.***
AH! A ***SELF-MADE MAN,*** DETERMINED TO SUCCEED ON HIS OWN TERMS OR NOT AT ALL! I RESPECT THAT!
AWAY THEN, AND FORGE YOUR ***OWN PATH!***

OH.
I MEAN...
...A LITTLE HELP WOULD HAVE BEEN NICE, MAYBE POINTING ME IN THE DIRECTION OF A NICE HOUSE TO LET.
MAYBE A FAVORABLE EXCHANGE RATE ON THE CURRENCY.
BUT NO MATTER.
THIS IS EXACTLY WHERE I NEED TO BE.
HOW CAN I HOPE TO BE THIS REALM'S MAGICAL DEFENDER IF I DO NOT WALK ITS STREETS, BE AMONG ITS PEOPLE?
A CYNICAL MAN MIGHT CALL THIS AN UNDERTAKING OF OBSCENE ARROGANCE. I AM NOT, NECESSARILY, DENYING THAT.
BUT UNDERTAKINGS OF OBSCENE ARROGANCE ARE KIND OF WHAT I DO.
EVERY REALM--EVERY CITY--HAS ITS OWN RHYTHMS. THIS IS WHERE I START LEARNING ASGARD'S.
UGH!
THE SOUNDS OF SOMEONE GETTING BEATEN UP ARE THE SAME HERE, IT SEEMS, AS THEY ARE IN NEW YORK.
BY THOR'S LONG GOLDEN TRESSES!
WELL, ALMOST.

EXCUSE ME. IS EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT HERE?
THANK YOU, I NEED HELP! I-- OH. YOU ARE DISAPPOINTINGLY **SMALL.**
IF YOU COULD, PERHAPS, ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF SOME **LARGER PASSERSBY,** I WOULD BE MOST IN YOUR DEBT.
STILL YOUR TONGUE, FOOL.
YOU WOULD DO WELL TO WALK ON, TINY STRANGER, LEST YOU FEEL **KNUD'S WRATH.**
AND WHO IS THIS **KNUD?** IS THAT YOU?
WHAT IS THIS AFFECTATION YOU HAVE WITH YOUR WORDS? I DO NOT LIKE IT. IT IS AS COARSE AS MY WIFE'S ARMPIT.
HURRY ONWARD, OR YOUR GULLET SHALL TASTE MY MEATY FIST, TINY ONE.
I'M REALLY NOT THAT MUCH SMALLER THAN YOU.
GEIRMUNDR, PUMMEL OUR UNWELCOME GUEST UNTIL HE SPEAKS MORE SMOOTHLY.
PUMMELING.
TO RETURN TO **OUR** BUSINESS, HOLT, PLEASE REMIND ME: WHICH LEG WAS I ABOUT TO BREAK?
GEK... KNUD...

WHAT IS--AH.
BEFORE THIS DEVOLVES INTO FURTHER VIOLENCE, MAY I SUGGEST A *CONVERSATION?*
I AM ONLY FAMILIAR *IN PASSING* WITH ASGARDIAN CULTURE AS A WHOLE.
I KNOW OF THE *UPPER ECHELONS* OF ASGARDIAN SOCIETY, AND I KNOW OF THE *WORLD TREE,* BUT I AM WOEFULLY IGNORANT OF MUCH ELSE.
FOR INSTANCE, IS THE AVERAGE ASGARDIAN *STRONGER* THAN THE AVERAGE MORTAL?
BRAKSH
IT WOULD APPEAR SO.
BUT ARE THEY *SIGNIFICANTLY* STRONGER?
WHAPP
IT WOULD APPEAR SO.

BUT DOES THE AVERAGE ASGARDIAN **WIELD MAGIC** AS A MATTER OF COURSE?
IT WOULD APPEAR NOT.
THWOK
AND A LESSON TO YOU THAT SHALL BE, GEIRMUNDR.
MY THANKS TO YOU, STRANGER! I AM **HOLT**!
STRANGE.
THE STRANGER'S NAME IS STRANGE? HOW STRANGE!
YOU ARE FROM **MIDGARD**, YES? I CAN TELL! ALLOW ME TO BUY YOU SOME MEAD!

YOU KNOW **THOR?** WHAT'S HE LIKE? IS HE AS NICE AS HE SEEMS? I SEE HIM FLYING BY EVERY DAY. HE SEEMS NICE.
HE'S NICE, YES.
"NICE." I KNEW HE WOULD BE.
AND YOU ARE A **SORCERER** WHO GAVE HIS POWER TO A **VILLAIN** WHO WOULD NOT GIVE IT BACK?
THERE IS A LESSON THERE, PERHAPS, IF YOU CARE TO LEARN IT.
I'VE LEARNED IT, DON'T WORRY. SO, TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF, HOLT. WHAT DO YOU DO HERE?
OH, I AM A WRITER.
LIKE... **A BARD?**
LIKE A BARD, BUT DIFFERENT. I DO NOT PLAY THE MANDOLIN NOR THE HARP, NOR DO I WRITE ABOUT BATTLES LIKE MY CONTEMPORARIES.
I WRITE TALES OF **LOVE** BUT ALSO TALES OF **MIRTH.**
ULTIMATELY, I SEEK TO COMBINE THE TWO AND TELL A NEW KIND OF TALE, AS EPIC AS ANYTHING FROM THE FIELD OF BATTLE.
YOU... WANT TO WRITE A **ROMANTIC COMEDY?**
WHAT AN ODD WAY TO PUT IT. I HAVE BEEN CALLING IT A **LOVE AND LAUGHTER STORY.** IT HAS MORE OF A RING TO IT.

OOOH, 'EY, THERE'S THE WRITER...
MY BROTHER. HE'S A CARPENTER, LIKE MY FATHER, MY MOTHER AND BOTH SETS OF GRANDPARENTS BEFORE THEM.
THEY WANTED ME TO BE A CARPENTER TOO.
BUT YOU DEFIED THEM?
NO, I'M A CARPENTER.
A CARPENTER WITH DREAMS OF ESTABLISHING EXCITING NEW GENRES OF STORYTELLING IN ASGARDIAN SOCIETY.
LIVA, MY FRIEND HERE SEEKS A ROOM, AND MONEY IS OF NO OBJECT. IS THE ROOM ABOVE STILL VACANT?
AH, WELL, THAT'S NOT QUITE--
EVER SINCE THAT LAST TENANT DIED IN BED, YES. THE COST IS EXORBITANT, BUT IT'S YOURS IF YOU WANT IT.
SO, I HAVE A FRIEND AND A ROOM. THIS DAY IS ENDING WELL.

KNOCK KNOCK
YOU CERTAINLY **DRESS** LIKE A WIZARD.
UM... HELLO?
AND YOU HAVE A WIZARD'S **NAME** AND ALSO A WIZARD'S **BEARD.**
SHOULD **I** GROW A BEARD? I OFTEN THINK I SHOULD, BUT WHEN I TRY, I PRODUCE NOTHING BUT A **DOWNY FLUFF** UPON MY CHIN.
AND... **ARE** YOU A WIZARD?
YES!
OF A SORT. I AM LEARNING. MAGIC IS A JOURNEY, IS IT NOT? THAT IS WHAT I AM TOLD WHEN MY AMBITION OUTSTRIPS MY TALENT.
MY NAME IS **ASLAK.** I HAVE BEEN SENT HERE TO DELIVER A SUMMONS. **HULDA** WOULD HAVE WORDS WITH THEE.
EXCELLENT. THAT'S VERY KIND OF HER. WHEN WOULD BE THE BEST--?
NOW. NOW WOULD BE BEST.
YOU ASGARDIANS MOVE FAST, DON'T YOU?
I'LL GRAB MY COAT.

HOW IS MIDGARD? I ENJOYED IT WHEN ASGARD HOVERED IN ITS SKIES. DOES IT STILL HAVE *TELEVISION?*
IT DOES.
WONDERFUL DEVICE, TELEVISION.
I LIKED THE STORY THEY SHOWED CALLED "THE GAME OF THRONES." ALSO "FRIENDS."
AH, THE BEAUTEOUS ROSKVA.
"BEAUTEOUS"?
IS MUCK BEAUTEOUS? ARE ***SKINNED KNUCKLES*** BEAUTEOUS?
THEY ARE TO ***ME***, MY LOVE.
DOCTOR STRANGE, THIS IS ***ROSKVA*** AND HER FRIEND ***GORM.***
I AM, SADLY, NOT ACQUAINTED WITH THE THREE UNCONSCIOUS GENTLEMEN.
PERMIT ME BUT A MOMENT AND I SHALL GLADLY INTRODUCE YOU TO--
HA!
CONGRATULATIONS, MIGHTY BICEP!
YOU HAVE ONCE MORE WON THE DAY!

CONGRATULATIONS *INDEED*, GORM! SONGS SHALL SURELY BE SUNG OF THIS DAY!
CRUNCH
WHUUUUUUGH!
GOOD EVE, MY LOVE.
GOOD EVE, ASLAK.
OOOOOOOH, MY PLUMS...
ROSKVA, THIS IS STEPHEN STRANGE, A DOCTOR AND A WIZARD, RECENTLY ARRIVED FROM MIDGARD.
I DID NOT KNOW MIDGARD EVEN *HAD* WIZARDS. THEY SURELY MUST, FOR YOU DEFINITELY HAVE THE *BEARD* OF ONE.
I OFTEN SAY TO ASLAK THAT THE REASON HIS EDUCATION IN SORCERY FLOUNDERS IS BECAUSE OF HIS INABILITY TO GROW FACIAL HAIR.
IT'S TRUE. SHE DOES.
WILL YOU BOTH STAY AND WRESTLE WITH ARMS?
I WOULD *LOVE* FOR YOU TO TROUNCE ME IN FULL VIEW OF THE PUBLIC-- HOWEVER, HULDA AWAITS.
HULDA IS WAITING? AND YET YOU TARRY? DO YOU NOT *WANT* TO BECOME A GREAT SORCERER ONE DAY? *GO*, FOOL!
GOOD DOCTOR, ENJOY YOUR STAY IN OUR GLORIOUS REALM.
THANK YOU, ROSKVA. I BELIEVE YOUR FRIEND IS IN SOME DISTRESS.
IT IS NOTHING HE HAS NOT ENDURED AND RECOVERED FROM BEFORE!
HAVE A NICE NIGHT...

WHAT A DELIGHTFUL YOUNG LADY.
IS SHE NOT THE MOST BEAUTIFULLY FIERCE WOMAN YOU HAVE EVER LAID EYES ON?
I AM THE LUCKIEST MAN IN ALL OF ASGARD TO DARE CALL HER MINE...
UNDER MY BREATH AND WHEN SHE IS OUT OF EARSHOT, NATURALLY.
NATURALLY.
AND HERE WE ARE.
YOU WERE EXPECTING AN ELABORATE TEMPLE, PERHAPS? A GOLD-HEWN ODE TO MAGIC?
NO, NOT REALLY. MY OWN PLACE BACK IN MIDGARD WAS SIMILARLY UNDERSTATED.
I MEAN, APART FROM THE WINDOW.
IT IS FOR YOU TO ENTER, DOCTOR STRANGE. I WILL REMAIN OUT HERE.
THANK YOU, ASLAK.
HELLO?

YOU ARE... *HULDA?*
AND YOU ARE ***DOCTOR STRANGE OF MIDGARD***-- MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS, EX-SORCERER SUPREME AND STEALER OF ASGARDIAN MAGIC.
AH. YES. ABOUT THAT.
DO YOU HAVE IT? THE BRANCH YOU STOLE FROM ***YGGDRASIL*** SOME TIME AGO?
SURELY YOU DID NOT RETURN TO ASGARD WITHOUT THIS SPLINTER FROM THE WORLD TREE, THIS SPLINTER THAT TRANSFORMED YOU INTO A ***GOD OF MAGIC?****
*IN ***DOCTOR STRANGE #384.*** --ALANNA
I BROUGHT IT. I RETURN IT TO YOU.
WITH?
I RETURN IT TO YOU WITH ***MY APOLOGIES.***

YOU MADE AN OFFERING TO YGGDRASIL AND THE OFFERING WAS DEEMED SUFFICIENT. YOU HAVE NOTHING, SPEAKING STRICTLY, TO APOLOGIZE FOR.
BUT I AM A *PETTY* WOMAN. YOU WOULD DO WELL TO REMEMBER THAT.
MY LORD THOR HAS INFORMED ME OF YOUR INTENTIONS. YOU SEEM TO BELIEVE A *SKALD* IS NOT ENOUGH ANYMORE TO PROTECT OUR REALM.
THIS IS A *BOLD* ASSUMPTION.
AS SORCERER SUPREME OF MIDGARD, I WAS NOT ONLY *EARTH'S DEFENDER,* I WAS ITS *STEWARD.* EVERY DAY, I WAS ENTRUSTED--
ENOUGH, ENOUGH.
ALL-FATHER THOR IS IMPRESSED WITH SPEECHES, FOR HE TRAFFICS IN THEM.
TO ALL-FATHER THOR, SPEECHES AND HAMMERS ARE ENDLESSLY ENTERTAINING.
YOU WILL NOT SWAY ME WITH A SPEECH. YOU WILL SWAY ME WITH A REASONED CONVERSATION, OR YOU WILL NOT SWAY ME AT ALL.
HOW DO YOU PLAN TO COMPENSATE FOR THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OUR MAGICS, DOCTOR STRANGE?

I HAVE ALREADY WIELDED ASGARDIAN MAGIC EFFECTIVELY ENOUGH, I THINK.
WHEN YOU POSSESSED THE BRANCH, INDEED YOU DID. AND IS THAT THE KIND OF MAGICIAN YOU ARE, STRANGE? ONE WHO NEEDS A WAND?
BUT MAYBE YOU ARE.
AFTER ALL, ON MIDGARD, WERE YOU NOT ADORNED WITH YOUR DELIGHTFUL CLOAK? DID YOU NOT WEAR THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO LIKE A BROOCH?
YOU ARE ONE WHO LIKES THE PARAPHERNALIA OF MAGIC. THE EFFECTS. THE TRINKETS.
I FAIL TO SEE HOW WIELDING OBJECTS OF POWER IS TO THE DETRIMENT OF ANY MAGICIAN.
BUT SURELY A SORCERER SUPREME WOULD SEEK TO ELEVATE THEMSELF ABOVE "ANY MAGICIAN."
IS THAT NOT WHERE THE "SUPREME" PORTION OF SUCH GRAND A TITLE SPRINGS FROM?
THE NEED TO BE BETTER THAN THE OTHERS?
OH, COME NOW, HULDA. AS THEY SAY SO ELOQUENTLY ON EARTH--

--CUT THE GUY SOME *SLACK.*
LOKI!

YOU SHOULD *NOT* BE HERE.
WHY? BECAUSE MY BROTHER HAS *BANISHED* ME? HULDA, *PLEASE.* HE KNOWS THAT WON'T TAKE.
IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE HE WELCOMES ME BACK HOME WITH A STERN WARNING AND HOPE IN HIS HEART THAT THIS TIME--
--THIS TIME--
--I WILL NOT DISAPPOINT HIM.
BUT I WILL *ALWAYS* DISAPPOINT HIM.
I BELIEVE YOU ARE SEVERELY UNDERESTIMATING YOUR BROTHER'S FURY. BUT *WHY* ARE YOU HERE?
WHEN MY SPIES TOLD ME THAT *STEPHEN STRANGE* WAS TO MEET WITH HULDA, EVEN *I* COULD WORK OUT WHAT THAT MEANT.
SO I, *AH,* CIRCUMNAVIGATED THOR'S BANISHMENT IN ORDER TO BE HERE TO MAKE MY CASE.
DO YOU REALLY THINK YOUR BROTHER WOULD ALLOW *YOU* TO BE SORCERER SUPREME AFTER WHAT YOU'VE DONE?
OH! YOU THINK I MEAN TO CLAIM THAT TITLE FOR *MYSELF?*
I HAVE ALREADY *BEEN* A SORCERER SUPREME. IT WAS...FINE, I SUPPOSE.
BUT NO-- I AM HERE TO ENDORSE MY FRIEND *DOCTOR STRANGE* FOR THE ROLE.
WHAT?

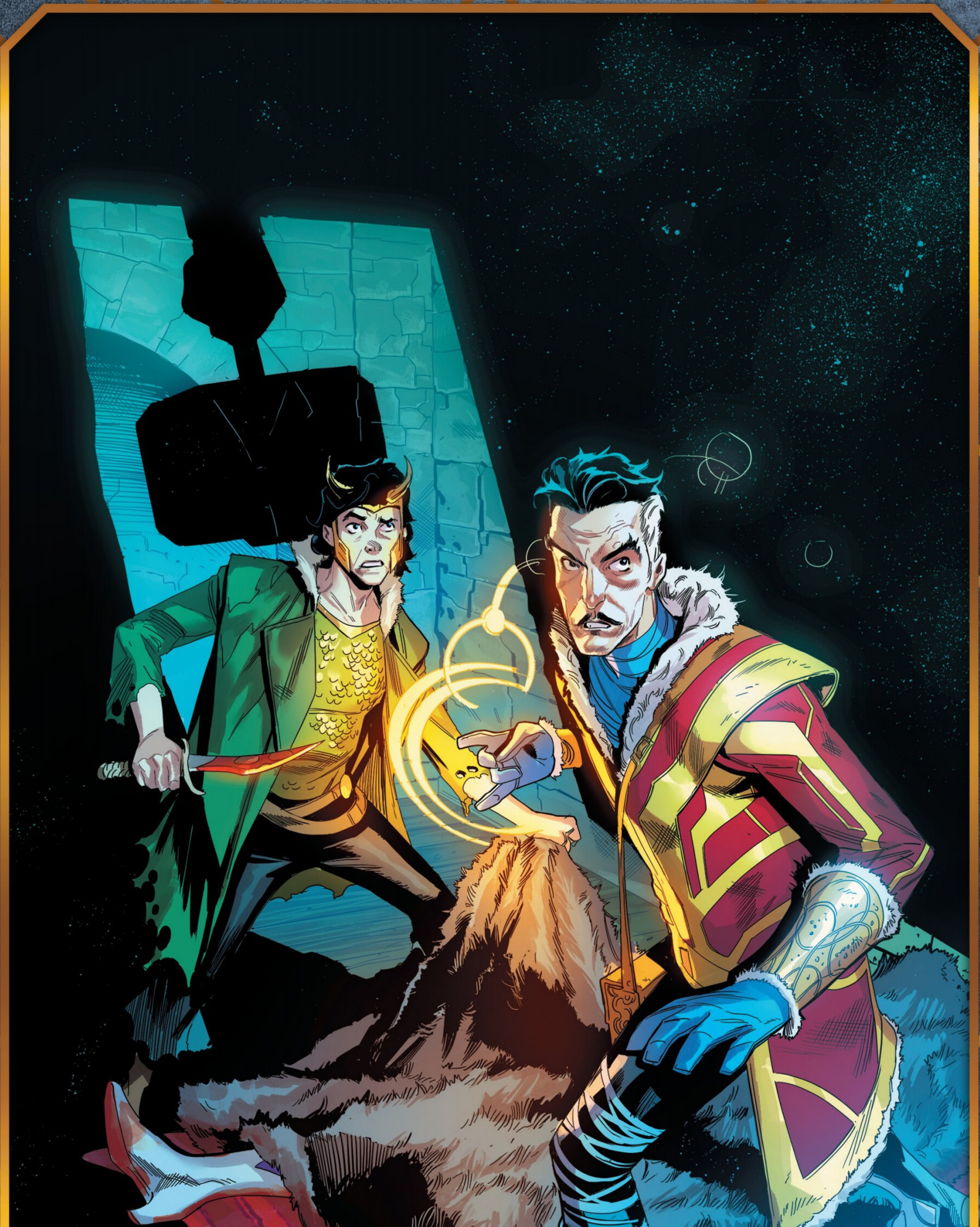
YES, WE HAVE NOT NEEDED A SORCERER SUPREME BEFORE NOW, SO ONE MIGHT ARGUE THAT WE WOULD BE INVENTING A POST FOR STEPHEN TO FILL--
--BUT I WOULD TAKE ISSUE WITH THIS!
I WAS A WONDERFUL SKALD. A MAGNIFICENT SKALD. BUT THE TRAIL I BLAZED MEANS THAT NO ONE CAN FOLLOW ME--NOT FOR A LONG, LONG TIME.
SO ASGARD NEEDS A NEW PROTECTOR, A NEW DEFENDER--AND THIS MAN IS THE WIZARD FOR THE JOB!
IS HE PERFECT? HARDLY. HE IS MORTAL, AND LIMITED, AND HE HAS, QUITE LITERALLY, HANDED HIS POWER TO ONE OF HIS GREATEST ENEMIES.
SO HE IS ALSO STUPID AND GULLIBLE AND SHORTSIGHTED.
BUT!
BUT IF THE BEST OF US LEARN FROM THEIR MISTAKES, THEN HE MIGHT YET BE THE GREATEST SORCERER THE UNIVERSE HAS EVER SEEN--
--SIMPLY BECAUSE OF ALL THE MISTAKES HE HAS MADE.
AS FOR HOW HE WILL COMPENSATE FOR THE DIFFERENCES IN MAGICS, MAY I SUGGEST THE SPELL OF AHKRYNON?
THE SPELL OF...? INTERESTING. DOCTOR, DO YOU KNOW OF THIS SPELL?

OF COURSE.
IN DIMENSIONS WHERE MAGIC IS NOT SO NATURALLY ACCESSED, MAGICIANS NEED TO ALTER THEIR OWN MINDSETS TO PAVE THE WAY FOR A GREATER UNDERSTANDING.
BUT FOR A MAGICIAN OF *YOUR* CALIBER, STEPHEN, IT WOULD BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *WIELDING* ASGARDIAN MAGIC--
--AND LETTING ASGARDIAN MAGIC *INHABIT YOU,* AS YOUR OWN MAGIC ALREADY DOES.
IT'S A TRICK. IT IS. IT MUST BE. BUT...IT'S ALSO A *BRILLIANT* SOLUTION TO A *DEFINITE* PROBLEM.
I WOULD BE AGREEABLE TO THIS NOTION.
YOU WOULD?
THEN IT'S SETTLED! COMPLETE THE SPELL AND YOU'LL BE THE FIRST *SORCERER SUPREME* OF *ASGARD!*
A CELEBRATION IS NEEDED, METHINKS! MAYBE A QUIET ONE, THAT DOES NOT ALERT *THOR* TO MY PRESENCE.
YOU'RE SURE OF THIS?
I HAVE KNOWN OF YOU FOR YEARS, DOCTOR. WHAT YOU'VE DONE. WHAT YOU'VE TRIED TO DO.
WHAT LOKI SAYS IS TRUE. YOU ARE NOT PERFECT... BUT THEN, I HAVE NEVER TRUSTED PERFECT PEOPLE.
YOU *TRY,* AND THAT MAKES YOU *WORTHY* OF FIGHTING FOR ASGARD. THAT MAKES YOU--

NO!

LOKI GOES TO STAB AGAIN, BUT THE BLADE SNAPS.
NOT THAT A SECOND STAB IS NEEDED.
I CAN TELL FROM HERE THAT HULDA'S HEART HAS BEEN PIERCED.
SHE IS DEAD EVEN BEFORE I REACH HER.
NO. *NO, WAIT.* I DID NOT DO THIS.
STRANGE, YOU MUST BELIEVE ME!
I DID NOT DO THIS!
AND THEN LOKI IS GONE, LEAVING ME WITH A *CORPSE*, A *MURDER WEAPON* AND NO IDEA WHAT TO DO *NEXT.*

DOCTOR STRANGE, IT'S ASLAK--IS EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT IN THERE?
UH-OH.



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CORPSE DISPOSAL IS A TRICKY BUSINESS.
EVEN FOR ONE SUCH AS I-- MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS, EX-SORCERER SUPREME OF EARTH--
--SUCH AN ENDEAVOR BECOMES A POTENTIAL MINEFIELD WHEN THE CORPSE IN QUESTION IS/WAS THE TOP MAGICAL AUTHORITY IN ASGARD.
TO TELEPORT THE REMAINS WOULD SET OFF A STRING OF ALARMS.
MOODE
RNIE'S PIZZERIA
TO DISSECT, DISINTEGRATE OR OTHERWISE DAMAGE THE BODY IS NOT SOMETHING I AM PREPARED TO COUNTENANCE. AFTER ALL, I DID NOT KILL HULDA.
LOKI DID.
SO ALL I COULD DO WAS RENDER THE CORPSE INVISIBLE AND LEAVE IT WHERE IT WAS WITH THE INTENTION OF GOING BACK FOR IT WHEN I AM NOT BEING OBSERVED.
NEW YORK.
AND IN THE MEANTIME--I FIND OUT WHY LOKI DID IT.

STEPHEN, MY LOVE.
CLEA, MY DARLING. LOKI?
HIDING. WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE THEM?
IF YOU WOULDN'T MIND.
HOW IS ASGARD?
COLD. MORE CORPSES THAN YOU'D IMAGINE.
REALLY?
PROBABLY NOT.
STEPHEN! EXCELLENT! I HAVE A THEORY!
YOU DO?
I WAS POSSESSED!
IT WOULD HAVE TAKEN CONSIDERABLE MAGICS TO COMMANDEER *MY* FORM--
--SO WE SHOULD BE NARROWING OUR SEARCH TO PAN-DIMENSIONAL ***GOD-SPRITES OR SIMILAR ELDRITCH ABOMINATIONS*** WITH--
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
SHACKLING YOU.
DON'T BE RIDICULOUS.

NOW *YOU'RE* AT IT, CLEA? STOP THIS AT ONCE. I WON'T TELL YOU--
CHAINS OF KRAKKAN!
THE CRIMSON BANDS OF CYTTORAK!
GAH!
I *DIDN'T* *KILL HULDA!*
YES, YOU DID.
WELL, *YES*, I *DID* IT, I *KILLED* *HER*, BUT I DIDN'T *WANT* TO.
LOKI CLAIMS TO HAVE NO IDEA HOW THE KNIFE GOT INTO THEIR HAND, LET ALONE WHY THEY STABBED HULDA.
THERE IS *SOME* EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT THEIR MIND HAS BEEN... AFFECTED.
YOU SEE? *SPRITES!*

STEPHEN, I WANT YOU TO THINK ABOUT THIS LOGICALLY.
IF I WANTED TO KILL HULDA AND GET AWAY WITH IT, I WOULD NOT HAVE KILLED HER IN FRONT OF *YOU.* WHY WOULD I DO THAT?
YOU LOVE TO PLAY YOUR LITTLE GAMES, LOKI.
I *DO*. I *DO* LOVE TO PLAY THEM.
BUT I AM NOT PLAYING THEM *NOW.*
IF YOU BRING ME BACK TO ASGARD, THOR WILL...
IT WOULD BE THE *END*. I WOULD HAVE *NO MORE* CHANCES WITH HIM.
THERE MUST BE *SOMETHING* I CAN DO TO PROVE WHAT I SAY.
THERE... IS *ONE* THING...
IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO LIE UNDER THE *AGONIES OF ERLING,* MY LOVE. SO NOW THAT WE KNOW LOKI SPEAKS THE TRUTH, WHAT DO WE DO?
YOU STAY HERE. WITH DOOM AS SORCERER SUPREME, EARTH NEEDS SOMEONE TO KEEP AN EYE ON THINGS.
SO WHAT WILL *YOU* DO?
TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS, I'M GOING TO NEED ACCESS TO ALL THE POWER I CAN MUSTER--AND THAT MEANS *ASGARDIAN* MAGIC.
HOW DO YOU PLAN TO DO THAT?
BY TAKING LOKI'S ADVICE.
OH, THIS WILL END *WELL.*

A MURDER, YOU SAY? A MYSTERY? SOLVING CLUES AND SUCHLIKE?
OOOH, I DOUBT ANY OF THAT IS FOR ME.
HOLT, I REALIZE IT'S ASKING A LOT, BUT I DON'T KNOW MY WAY AROUND, I DON'T KNOW WHO THE PEOPLE ARE, WHO THE PLAYERS ARE...
IF I'M GOING TO PERFORM THE SPELL OF AHKRYNON, IF I'M GOING TO FIND THE KILLER, I'LL NEED A GUIDE.
YOU WON'T EVEN TELL ME WHO'S DEAD. IS IT SOMEONE IMPORTANT? IS IT SOMEONE I'D KNOW? IS IT EILEIFR? I WOULDN'T MIND IF IT WERE EILEIFR.
ASGARD.
HOLT.
EILEIFR.
I WRITE TALES OF LOVE AND LAUGHTER, STEPHEN, NOT MURDER.
IF YOU NEED MY HELP, PERHAPS, IN WOOING A POTENTIAL SWEETHEART IN AN UNEXPECTEDLY AMUSING FASHION, I WOULD BE A BOON LIKE NO OTHER.
BUT THIS... IS NOT MY FORTE. I AM SORRY.
NO, IT'S OKAY. THIS KIND OF LIFE ISN'T FOR EVERYONE. SOMETIMES, I FORGET THAT.
SPEAKING OF THINGS YOU'VE FORGOTTEN, DO YOU NOT HAVE AN INTERVIEW SCHEDULED FOR GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT UNTIL YOUR FINANCES ARE SETTLED?
OH DAMN.
THE ACCUSATIONS OF MALPRACTICE ARE SCURRILOUS, MALICIOUS AND FALSE--

--AND MOST OF THEM DIDN'T EVEN HAPPEN! BUT EVEN SO, MY REPUTATION HAS TAKEN, SHALL WE SAY, A KNOCK.
SO HERE I AM, FORCED TO ENTERTAIN THE POSSIBILITY OF TAKING ON A MORTAL APPRENTICE. WHAT ARE YOUR CREDENTIALS?
I AM A HIGHLY QUALIFIED MIDGARDIAN DOCTOR.
I'M SURE YOU'RE VERY GOOD WITH LEECHES, BUT IN ASGARD, WE HAVE LONG SINCE PROGRESSED BEYOND SUCH METHODS. WHAT DID YOU SAY YOUR NAME WAS?
STRANGE.
"STRANGE." "STRANGE." BAH! I CANNOT EVEN PRONOUNCE IT.
YOU'RE PRONOUNCING IT JUST FINE. IT'S THE WORD STRANGE, BUT AS A NAME.
I SHALL CALL YOU DOCTOR TINY MAN.
I'M REALLY NOT THAT MUCH SMALLER THAN--
YOU ARE A TINY DOCTOR AND I WILL BROOK NO ARGUMENT!
YOU WILL NEED TO PROVE YOURSELF. YOU'RE NOT IN MIDGARD NOW, DOCTOR TINY MAN.
YOU WILL WORK TODAY, AND IF YOU MANAGE NOT TO AMPUTATE SOMEONE'S HEAD THAT DOES NOT NEED TO BE AMPUTATED, YOU SHALL HAVE YOUR "JOB."
THE DAY PASSES IN A WHIRLWIND OF COMMON AILMENTS, MYSTERIOUS NEW DISEASES AND MORE INJURIES INVOLVING AXES THAN I AM USED TO.

WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM?
I HAVE A COLD.
WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM?
MY FOOT FELL OFF.
WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE...?
WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM?
I HAVE AN UNSIGHTLY RASH. WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IT?
BUT THE ASGARDIAN PEOPLE ARE NO MORE OR LESS NOBLE THAN THE PEOPLE OF EARTH.
THEY ARE LARGER, YES, AND HARDIER, IN SOME CASES, BUT THEY FRET AND THEY WORRY JUST LIKE HUMANS.
AND THEY FEAR THE BAD NEWS A DOCTOR WILL DELIVER JUST AS MUCH.
THEY ARE AS FRAIL. THEY ARE AS BRAVE. THEY ARE AS MORTAL AS THE MORTALS.

DOCTOR TINY MAN--DESPITE YOUR DIMINUTIVE STATURE AND IMPOSSIBLE-TO-PRONOUNCE NAME, I HAVE DECIDED TO GRANT YOU YOUR WISH AND ALLOW YOU TO WORK FOR ME.
FINISH UP WITH THE LAST PATIENT AND RETURN TOMORROW.
AH, WE MET YESTERDAY, DIDN'T WE? ROSKVA, YES?
YES. AND YOU ARE DOCTOR... UNUSUAL?
STRANGE. WHAT CAN I HELP YOU WITH TODAY, ***ROSKVA?***
I SEEM TO HAVE A KNIFE IN MY SHOULDER.
AH. SO YOU DO.
ANY IDEA HOW IT GOT THERE?
I PUT IT THERE. WE WERE TRAINING AND THE KNIFE WAS IN MY ***HAND***, AND THEN IT WAS IN ROSKVA'S ***SHOULDER.*** AND THAT'S HOW IT HAPPENED.
WHAT A... ***DETAILED*** ACCOUNT.
GORM, GO HOME. ACCIDENTS HAPPEN, AND PEOPLE GET STABBED. I DO NOT NEED YOU TO HOLD MY HAND WHILE I AM STITCHED.
BUT I FEEL RESPONSIBLE.
BECAUSE YOU ***ARE*** RESPONSIBLE.

BUT YOU ARE STRONG! YOU ARE **ROSKVA THE TROLL-STRANGLER** AND YOU SHALL RECOVER!
I KNOW. GO HOME NOW.
I WILL PRAY TO ***THOR*** FOR YOUR GOOD HEALTH!
SORRY ABOUT HIM.
DO ASGARDIANS PRAY TO THOR?
SOME OF THEM.
ISN'T THAT ODD? PRAYING TO YOUR KING, EVEN IF HE ***IS*** A GOD?
MAYBE.
SO...ROSKVA THE TROLL-STRANGLER, *EH?* THAT'S QUITE A NICKNAME.
HRM.
YOU DON'T LIKE IT?
THERE WAS A WOODLAND VILLAGE, NORTH OF HERE. ISOLATED. VULNERABLE. A TARGET FOR RAIDERS.
AT THE TURN OF THE LAST SEASON, MY FRIENDS AND I WENT TO DRIVE THOSE RAIDERS AWAY.

"THERE WAS **BLOOD** AND **GRISTLE** AND MUCH IN THE WAY OF VIOLENCE. MY HEART SANG TO MATCH MY AX.
"THE RAIDERS REFUSED TO RETREAT, AND WE... WE REFUSED TO RELENT. ONE BY ONE, THEY FELL.
"THEIR CHOICE. THEIR DEATHS.
"WE DIDN'T KNOW IT AS WE FOUGHT, BUT WE WOULD ***MISS*** A TROLL, WHO WOULD FOLLOW US WHEN WE RETURNED HOME.
"HE WOULD WAIT TWO NIGHTS-- THEN KILL ONE OF OUR NUMBER, WHOSE NAME WAS ***NORRELL***, AND WHO WAS A ***GOOD MAN.*** A ***VERY*** GOOD MAN.
"AND THEN?
"THEN HE WOULD TRY TO KILL ***ME***, IN MY OWN CHAMBERS.
"WITHOUT SWORD, WITHOUT AX, WITHOUT CUDGEL OR BLADE, I FOUGHT THIS TROLL IN THE MUD AND THE SNOW, AND I STRANGLED HIM.
"AND THAT IS HOW I GOT MY NAME."

WOULD YOU LIKE A SCAR?
SORRY?
I KNOW HOW MUCH WARRIORS LIKE THEIR SCARS. I WAS WONDERING IF YOU'D LIKE TO KEEP YOURS.
OH. YES, PLEASE. JUST SO I CAN POINT TO IT WHENEVER GORM ANNOYS ME. IT WILL MAKE HIM FEEL BAD.
THEN YOU'RE DONE HERE.
ROSKVA, I HAVE SOMETHING I NEED TO DO, BUT I NEED A GUIDE TO DO IT. MIGHT YOU BE AVAILABLE?
TO TAKE YOU AROUND? INTRODUCE YOU TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE? THIS IS NOT WHAT I DO.
BUT YOU SHOULD ASK MY... WHAT DO YOU CALL IT IN MIDGARD? SUITOR? BOYFRIEND?
ASLAK WOULD KNOW THE PEOPLE TO TALK TO. HE IS NOT ONE OF US. HE IS NOT A ***BARBARIAN,*** SWINGING AN AX AND REVELING IN THE SLAUGHTER.
HE IS LIKE ***YOU.*** HE IS QUIET AND GENTLE. HE STUDIES TO BECOME A ***SORCERER.***
ALSO, I HAPPEN TO KNOW THAT HULDA HASN'T SENT FOR HIM ***AT ALL*** TODAY, SO HE HAS SOME FREE TIME.

I AM HONORED THAT YOU WOULD COME TO ME, DOCTOR STRANGE. I FEEL AS THOUGH THERE IS A LOT I COULD LEARN FROM A SORCERER SUPREME.
EX-SORCERER SUPREME.
THANK YOU FOR DOING THIS, ASLAK. SO *THIS* IS ASGARD'S PREMIER SHOP OF MAGIC, IS IT?
IT IS... *ONE* OF THEM.
IT IS DEFINITELY THE *CHEAPEST*, WHICH YOU *DID* SAY WOULD BE A FACTOR?
UNTIL I GET MY ASGARDIAN FINANCES SORTED, VERY MUCH SO.
ASLAK THE *ETERNAL APPRENTICE!* WHO DO YOU BRING WITH YOU? ANOTHER MAGICIAN, STUMBLING THROUGH THE ARCANE ARTS WITH NARY A--
I NEED *THESE* INGREDIENTS.
HMMM... PERFORMING THE *SPELL OF AHKRYNON,* ARE YOU? TRYING TO GET TO GRIPS WITH ASGARDIAN MAGIC? IT WILL NOT BE--
DO YOU *HAVE THEM?* DO YOU HAVE THE SKULL OF A *DARK TROLL?*
DARK TROLLS ARE OUR SPECIALITY.
ASLAK, THERE YOU ARE.
HRAFEN, YOU WERE LOOKING FOR ME?
EVERYONE'S LOOKING FOR YOU. HULDA NEVER TURNED UP FOR THE FARMING COUNCIL'S PETITION TO THE ALL-FATHER.
HULDA *DESPISES* THE FARMING COUNCIL AND BELIEVES THEY SHOULD GROW THEIR CROPS WITHOUT THE AID OF MAGIC.

THAT MAY BE SO, BUT ALL-FATHER THOR WISHES TO HEAR HER OPINION FOR HIMSELF-- SO IT IS FOR YOU TO FIND HER AND SEND HER ONWARD.
ONE DOES NOT "SEND" HULDA ONWARD, BACKWARD OR ANYWARD.
SEE TO IT, ASLAK!
OH DEAR.
DOCTOR STRANGE, YOU SAW HULDA LAST. DID SHE MAKE MENTION OF HER PLANS TO AVOID THE FARMING COUNCIL'S PETITION?
...
ASLAK, WE JUST MET YESTERDAY. YOU DON'T KNOW ME. YOU HAVE NO REASON TO TRUST ME.
OH, I WOULD NOT WORRY ABOUT THAT, DOCTOR. I HAVE A VERY TRUSTING NATURE.
HULDA REGULARLY TELLS ME THAT IT IS A FLAW IN MY CHARACTER AND THAT IT WILL LEAD TO PEOPLE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF ME.
...YES.
HULDA'S DEAD.

HULDA?
IS DEAD?
YES.
LOKI KILLED HER LAST NIGHT, ALTHOUGH THEY CLAIM TO HAVE BEEN POSSESSED AT THE TIME.
I TURNED HER BODY INVISIBLE, BUT I NEED TO MOVE IT. I NEED TO HIDE IT SOMEWHERE UNTIL I CAN FIGURE OUT WHAT HAPPENED.
LOKI SAYS THEY HAVE BEEN SET UP. AMAZINGLY, I BELIEVE THEM. I NEED YOUR HELP TO FIND THE KILLER.
AND WHY DO YOU NOT JUST... *TELL THOR?*
BECAUSE THAT COULD SNAP WHATEVER IS LEFT OF THE BOND BETWEEN THEM.
NORMALLY, I WOULD STAY OUT OF OTHER PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS, BUT THIS IS ***THOR AND LOKI.*** AN IRREPARABLE RIFT BETWEEN THEM COULD SHAKE THE VERY ***COSMOS.***
THE REPERCUSSIONS COULD BE... ***INCALCULABLE.***
COULD I...***SEE*** THE BODY?
OF COURSE.

IT SEEMS YOU WERE NOT, IN FACT, SPEAKING IN JEST.
AND HOW DO I KNOW THAT *YOU* DIDN'T KILL HULDA?
YOU DON'T.
SO WHY WOULD I HELP YOU?
YOU HAVE TO MAKE UP YOUR OWN MIND ABOUT THAT.
IN THE SAME WAY THAT I AM BELIEVING LOKI--DESPITE THE FACT THAT *I SAW THEM* KILL HER--I AM ASKING YOU TO BELIEVE ME.
PLEASE, ASLAK-- HELP ME HIDE HER BODY.
HIDE HER BODY *WHERE?*
TO BURY HULDA BETWEEN THE ROOTS OF *YGGDRASIL* IS... IS...
OOOOH, I AM GOING TO HEL.
WHAT WAS HULDA LIKE?
AS A MENTOR? STERN.
SHE MAY HAVE THOUGHT ME AN IDIOT, BUT SHE TAUGHT ME WHAT I KNOW. SHE TAUGHT ME *ALL* I KNOW.

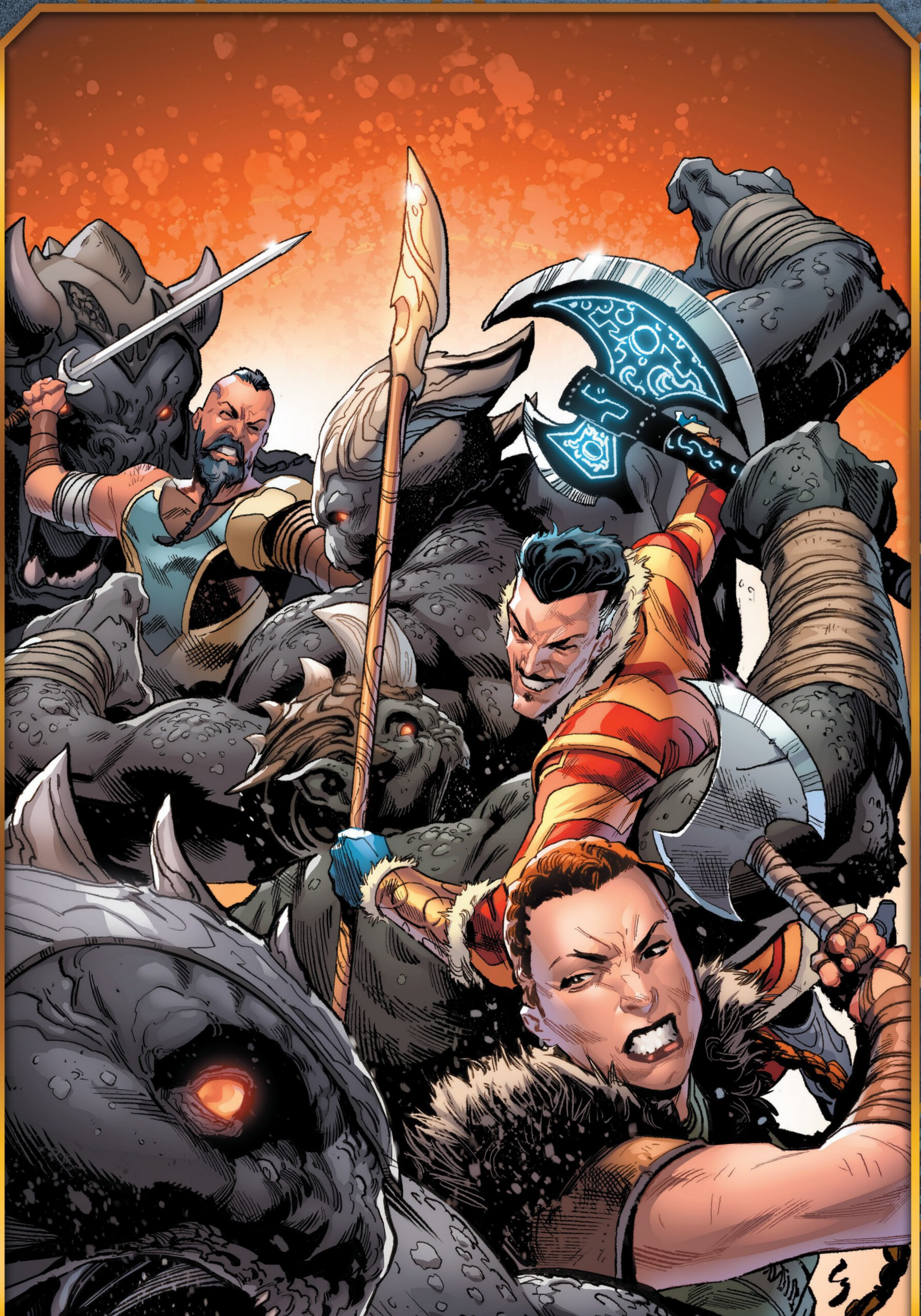
BEFORE LEARNING UNDER HER, I HAD ONLY HEARD OF HOW FIERCE SHE WAS ON THE **BATTLEFIELD.** BUT HER SKILLS AS A SORCERESS WERE ALMOST BEYOND COMPARE.
SNOWING.
IT'S ALWAYS SNOWING IN ASGARD.
DID SHE HAVE ANY ENEMIES?
SARVI
TAVERN
SHE HAD NOTHING **BUT** ENEMIES.
SHE WAS RUDE AND ABRASIVE AND SHORT-TEMPERED. SHE SAID NOT A KIND WORD WHEN A **MEAN ONE** WOULD DO.
SHE PREFERRED THE OLD WAYS, BUT SHE SAID THAT ASGARD HAD TO PROGRESS ITS IDEAS IN ORDER TO SHAKE OFF ITS STAGNANCY.
SHE SAW THOR'S RISE TO POWER AS THE NECESSARY **CATALYST** FOR THIS CHANGE.
DO YOU KNOW WHY LOKI MAY HAVE WANTED TO KILL HER?
NONE. I ALWAYS THOUGHT THEY LIKED HER.
I SHALL SEE YOU COME THE MORNING, DOCTOR?
THE EVENING, ACTUALLY.
I HAVE TO WORK.

I WALK INTO MY ROOM AND IMMEDIATELY, I KNOW THAT SOMETHING IS WRONG.
WHATEVER HITS ME CANCELS OUT MY MAGIC--
--BUT I'VE BEEN WITHOUT MAGIC BEFORE.
IT'S NOT SO BAD.
CHOK
FIGHTING'S A FUNNY THING.

THE NATURAL INSTINCT IS TO *RETREAT* FROM A SWINGING AX, TO GET AS MUCH DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND THE SHINY BIT AS POSSIBLE.
BUT IF YOUR ATTACKER IS DETERMINED, AS MINE SEEMS TO BE, THIS WILL ONLY GIVE HIM ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO REDUCE YOU TO A *QUIVERING MASS OF BLOODIED CHUNKS.*
SO WHAT YOU *ACTUALLY* WANT TO DO IS GET IN CLOSE. STOP HIM FROM UTILIZING HIS WEAPON.
ONCE YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY HIS ADVANTAGE--
--YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO ENGAGE HIM IN *MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE.*

A FIGHT IS A *CONVERSATION.*
YOU HAVE *YOUR* VIEWPOINT, AND HE HAS *HIS.*
HE MAY *BLUSTER* AND *RAGE* AND *ACCUSE*...
HE MAY *SHOUT* OVER YOU, *REFUSE* TO LISTEN, *DENY* YOUR LOGIC...
...BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN HE'S *WINNING.*
IT JUST MEANS HE'S *LOUD.*

I SOLVE MYSTERIES ALL THE TIME.
WHETHER THEY BE MEDICAL OR MYSTICAL, MYSTERIES ARE MY *THING.*
I DON'T KNOW WHY HULDA WAS KILLED. I DON'T KNOW HOW LOKI WAS USED. I DON'T KNOW WHY THIS INDIVIDUAL JUST ATTACKED ME.
BUT TO BEGIN TO SOLVE ANY MYSTERY, YOU NEED *ONE THING,* AND NOW I HAVE IT.
MY FIRST *CLUE.*



ASGARD.
AND HE ATTACKED YOU WITH *THIS?*
AND THEN JUMPED OUT MY WINDOW, YES.
I WAS WONDERING IF THERE WAS ANYTHING YOU COULD TELL ME ABOUT IT, HOLT--ON ACCOUNT OF HOW, YOU KNOW, YOUR FAMILY ARE ALL *CARPENTERS* AND *WEAPON MAKERS.*
IT'S AN *AX.*
I... SEE.
I AM BUT A WRITER OF--WHAT DID YOU CALL THEM? "ROMANTIC COMEDIES"? CARPENTRY IS NOT MY AREA OF...
HMM.
HMM?
THERE IS A CERTAIN *FLOURISH* TO THE CARVINGS THAT MY BROTHERS MAY BE ABLE TO...
SIGH
I WILL RETURN, STEPHEN, ONCE I HAVE SPOKEN WITH MY FAMILY ABOUT-- *UGH--CARPENTRY.*
THANK YOU, HOLT!
DOCTOR TINY MAN, IS THE PATIENT DEAD?

ACTUALLY, MISTER STEINGRIMR, THE PATIENT SHOULD MAKE A FULL RECOVERY. AND NOW I'M GOING HOME.
HOME? IT IS BARELY NOON!
YOU CALLED ME HERE *THIRTEEN HOURS AGO* AND LEFT ME TO OPERATE *WITHOUT* ASSISTANCE. I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW.
BAH! ARE ALL MORTALS SO MOLLYCODDLED AS YOU? IF I WERE A YOUNGER MAN--
YOU'D PROBABLY STILL BE ABLE TO PRACTICE MEDICINE. I TRUST YOU'LL WAIT WITH HIM UNTIL HE WAKES.
BEING A DOCTOR IS ALL ABOUT PRIORITIES.
TRIAGE, WE CALL IT.
FINDING OUT *WHO* ATTACKED ME AND WHY IS *PRETTY HIGH* ON MY LIST OF THINGS TO DO-- BUT IT IS NOT NUMBER ONE.
NUMBER ONE IS THE *SPELL OF AHKRYNON.*
IN ORDER TO BECOME *SORCERER SUPREME* OF ASGARD, I NEED TO CONQUER ASGARD'S MAGICS--
AH! THE *TROUBLE-MAKER!*
--AND THE ONLY WAY TO DO THAT IS TO UNDERGO A SLIGHT *REALIGNMENT* OF MY *INTERIOR SELF.*
LIVA. HOW ARE YOU THIS--?
THE WINDOW IN YOUR ROOM, DOCTOR. YOU PUSHED SOMEONE THROUGH IT LAST NIGHT.

KRASH
ACTUALLY, NO, HE JUMPED THROUGH IT OF HIS OWN ACCORD. I FIXED IT THOUGH.
FIXING IT ISN'T THE PROBLEM.
I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU DO THINGS IN MIDGARD, BUT HERE WE TRY TO STEER CLEAR OF WANTON VIOLENCE.
ARE WE NOT CONVERSING IN THE MIDDLE OF A BAR FIGHT?
YES, LIVA. IT WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN.
THIS IS YOUR FIRST WARNING, DOCTOR.
THE SPELL OF AHKRYNON IS NOT WITHOUT RISK, BUT RISK ACCOMPANIES EVERYTHING OF VALUE.
AND SO LONG AS I HAVE THE PROPER INGREDIENTS, EVERYTHING SHOULD BE FINE.
THAT SNEAKY LITTLE--

THE BEST (?) LITTLE MAGIC SHOP IN ASGARD.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO TELL YOU. I AM AS *SHOCKED* AS YOU ARE.
IF I HAD USED THIS, MY MIND WOULD HAVE *SPLINTERED.*
HOW *AWFUL!*
REST ASSURED, I SHALL BE HAVING WORDS WITH MY SUPPLIER!
SO DO YOU HAVE A *REAL* ONE?
A REAL *DARK TROLL* SKULL? OF COURSE! I'LL JUST--*OOOH.* WE'RE ALL *OUT,* I'M AFRAID.
SO I'LL HAVE TO SOURCE ONE *MYSELF,* WILL I? ANY *TIPS?*
DARK TROLLS ARE AMONG THE RAREST OF ALL ASGARDIAN TROLLS--FIERCE AND POWERFUL AND RECLUSIVE, THEY ARE. IT'S NOTORIOUSLY TRICKY TO SEPARATE ONE FROM ITS HEAD.
"USE SOMETHING SHARP!"
ASLAK, ROSKVA, THANK YOU FOR DOING THIS.
IT IS AGAINST ASGARDIAN CUSTOM TO ALLOW A VISITOR TO GO ON A DARK TROLL HUNT WITHOUT A BORN WARRIOR BY THEIR SIDE.
WHICH IS WHY I ASKED *ROSKVA* TO ACCOMPANY US.
WHICH IS WHY I ASKED *MY FRIENDS.*

YOU ALREADY KNOW **GORM.** HE'S THE IDIOT.
GOOD DAY.
THIS IS **SOLVEI.** THE BEAUTIFUL DEMON, WE CALL HER, ON ACCOUNT OF HER ARTISTRY WITH BLADES.
INTO THE MOUNTAINS WE GO, IS IT? GOOD THING I WORE MY WARM BOOTS.
AND THAT'S **IVAR.**
I SHOOT THINGS WITH ARROWS.
HE'S NOT VERY GOOD WITH PEOPLE.
MY THANKS TO YOU ALL. I KNOW THIS WILL BE DANGEROUS, SO I WISH I COULD SAY IF YOU HAVE ANY DOUBTS, PLEASE REMAIN BEHIND--
--BUT I'M AFRAID I DON'T HAVE THAT LUXURY.
COME! LET US UNDERTAKE THIS DANGEROUS JOURNEY BEFORE WE COME TO OUR SENSES!

THERE ARE PLACES IN ASGARD THAT CAN ONLY BE ACCESSED ON FOOT.
IT TAKES TWO DAYS OF TRUDGING THROUGH SNOW BEFORE WE EVEN ENTER DARK TROLL TERRITORY.
ULLR?
A WEEK AGO, VOLSTAGG WAS YOUR FAVORITE. THE WEEK BEFORE, THOR HIMSELF.
VOLSTAGG IS A FAVORITE, THOUGH THOR IS A BIT TOO OBVIOUS, NO?
ULLR HAS AN AIR OF FOREBODING TO HIM, A DARK MYSTERY THAT I, TOO, WOULD LIKE TO CULTIVATE.
KEEP CULTIVATING, GORM. IT IS GOOD TO HAVE HOBBIES.
FOR ME, IT IS THE LADY SIF, ALL AND EVERY DAY.
ASLAK, WHAT SAY YOU? WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE GOD?
UM, I DO NOT... PROBABLY SNOTRA.
SNOTRA! HAW!
IGNORE HIM, ASLAK. SHE IS THE GODDESS OF WISDOM AND COURTESY, AND HE HAS NEITHER!
ON DAY THREE, IT BECOMES APPARENT THAT WE ARE BEING WATCHED.
THE OTHERS PICK UP ON THIS BEFORE I DO, BUT I'M NOT FAR BEHIND.

I'M GOOD AT NOTICING *THE SMALL THINGS.*
IVAR! BEHIND US!
MY ARROWS HAVE NEW HOMES.

IT IS NOT *UNHEARD OF* FOR BANDITS TO ATTACK A TROUPE OF WANDERING WARRIORS.
LOOK OUT, ROSKVA!
BUT IT *IS* UNUSUAL.
GOOD DAY TO YOU, SIR! ALLOW MY AX TO MEET YOUR BRAIN!
BANDITS THE UNIVERSE OVER ARE RENOWNED FOR GOING AFTER SIGNIFICANTLY WEAKER PREY.
THIS, PLUS LAST NIGHT'S ATTACK--
THE SPELL OF--
THE BITING WRATH OF THE, AH--
--MAKES ME SUSPECT THAT SOMEONE DOESN'T WANT ME TO SUCCEED.
OR, INDEED, *SURVIVE.*
HONESTLY, ASLAK, LEARNING SOME *OFFENSIVE SPELLS* MIGHT BE AN IDEA AT SOME POINT IN YOUR FUTURE.
THOUGH, LIKE ASLAK, I AM NOT EXACTLY COVERING MYSELF IN GLORY THIS DAY.

EVERY REALM HAS ITS OWN ROTES--ITS OWN SPELL FORMULAE--ATTUNED TO ITS PRECISE FREQUENCY.
BOLTS OF BALTHAKK!
THESE ROTES CAN ABSOLUTELY BE USED IN OTHER REALMS, BUT--
--UNLESS THE MAGIC IS SUPPLEMENTED--
--THE LONGER THE MAGICIAN IS AWAY, THE LESS EFFECTIVE THE SPELLS.
SHIELD OF THE SERAPHIM!
TO OPERATE HERE, I'VE BEEN CHANNELLING MY SKILLS THROUGH ASGARDIAN MAGIC.
MY STATUS AS A MORTAL MAKES THIS... PROBLEMATIC.
HENCE THE NEED FOR THE REALIGNMENT.
HENCE THE NEED FOR THE SPELL OF AHKRYNON.
IF I CAN STAY ALIVE LONG ENOUGH TO CAST IT.
WHAT?
AH.

THE DARK TROLLS HAVE ARRIVED.
AND THEY APPEAR TO BE ON OUR SIDE.
THIS IS A GOOD THING, AS ALTHOUGH THEIR NUMBERS ARE FEW, THEIR TALENT FOR WARFARE IS UNDENIABLE.
OUR REMAINING ATTACKERS FLEE INTO THE SNOW, AND INTRODUCTIONS ARE MADE.

HER NAME IS *TYRLAUG.* SHE IS THE *QUEEN* OF THE DARK TROLLS.
SHE DOESN'T APPRECIATE OUR INTRUSION INTO HER TERRITORY. SHE APPRECIATES IT EVEN LESS WHEN SHE LEARNS WHY WE'RE HERE.
YOU SEEK THE **SKULL** OF A DARK TROLL? I SEE.
DO YOU INTEND TO LOP ***MY*** HEAD OFF? OR PERHAPS MY ***MOTHER'S*** HEAD?
I HAVE A ***NIECE***. SHE'S SMALL. IS THERE A PARTICULAR ***SIZE*** YOU'RE LOOKING FOR?
I'M FULLY AWARE THAT NOTHING I SAY WILL MAKE THIS SOUND BETTER, BUT I WAS HOPING YOU MIGHT HAVE A SPARE SKULL JUST... ***LYING AROUND?***
I FEAR I MAY HAVE MISJUDGED THIS MOMENT.
OF COURSE I HAVE A SPARE SKULL. YOU CAN TAKE ONE FROM THE ***PILE.***
IT TAKES ME ANOTHER HOUR TO DISCERN WHETHER OR NOT SHE IS BEING SARCASTIC.
(SHE ISN'T.)

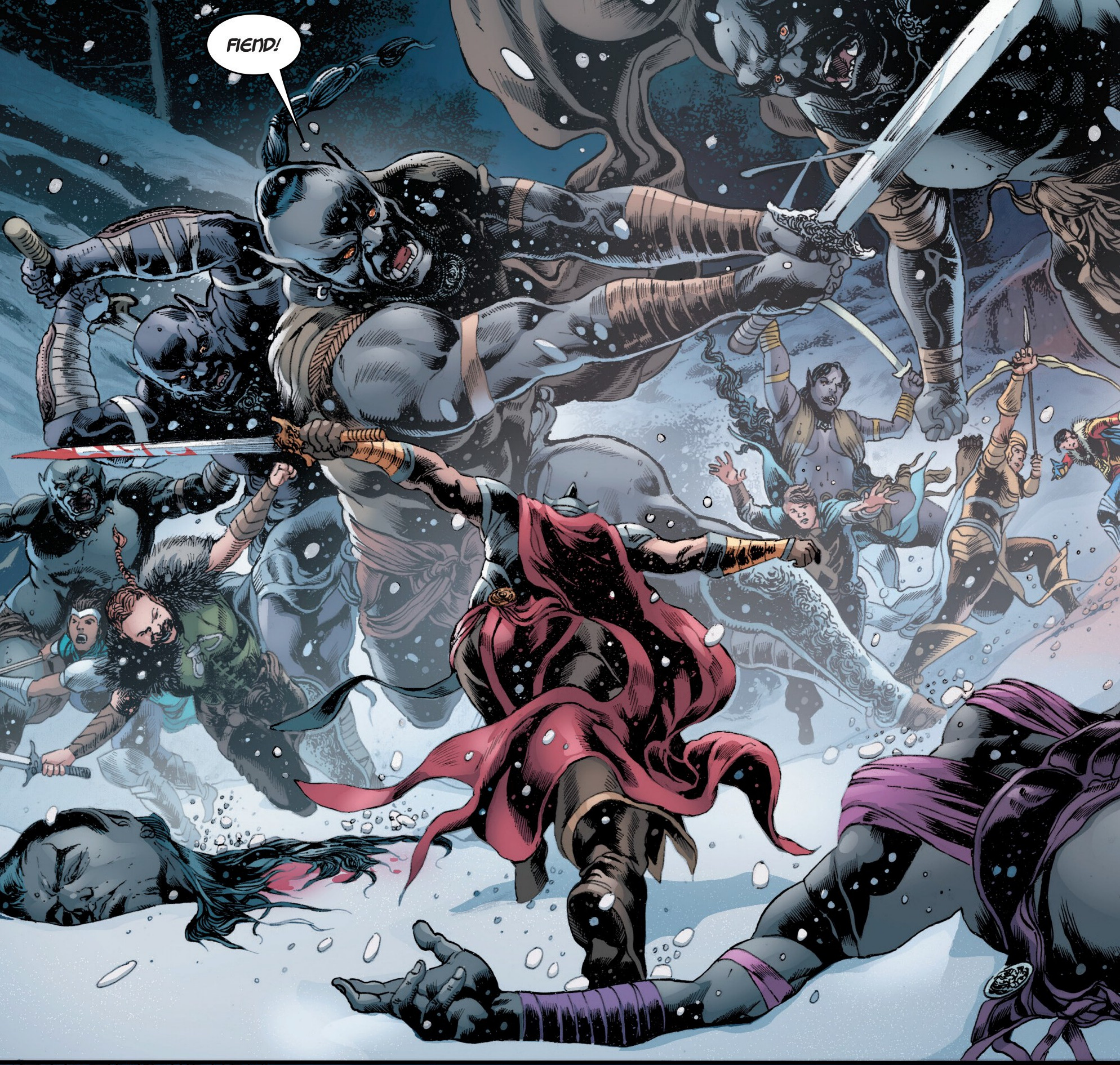
THEY SET UP CAMP.
THE DARK TROLLS ARE LARGELY NOMADIC, AND THIS HAS BEEN A HARSH AND ENDLESS WINTER-- YET THEY DON'T HESITATE TO SHARE THEIR FOOD AND THEIR MEAD.
ARE ALL MIDGARDIANS MAGIC?
NO, NOT ALL OF US. VERY FEW OF US, ACTUALLY. ARE ALL DARK TROLLS LIKE YOU?
LIKE ME?
YOU KNOW.
I DO NOT.
ARE THEY ALL SO... *UM...?*
AH.
I MET ***THOR*** ONCE.
HE LOOKED ME UP AND DOWN AND SAID SOMETHING ALONG THE LINES OF "VERILY, THOU ART THE FIRST ***SEXY TROLL*** I HAVE ENCOUNTERED."
THAT... ACTUALLY SOUNDS A LOT LIKE HIM, YES, BUT I DIDN'T MEAN...
I HAVE SOMEONE. BACK ON MIDGARD.
OF COURSE YOU DO, LITTLE MORTAL.

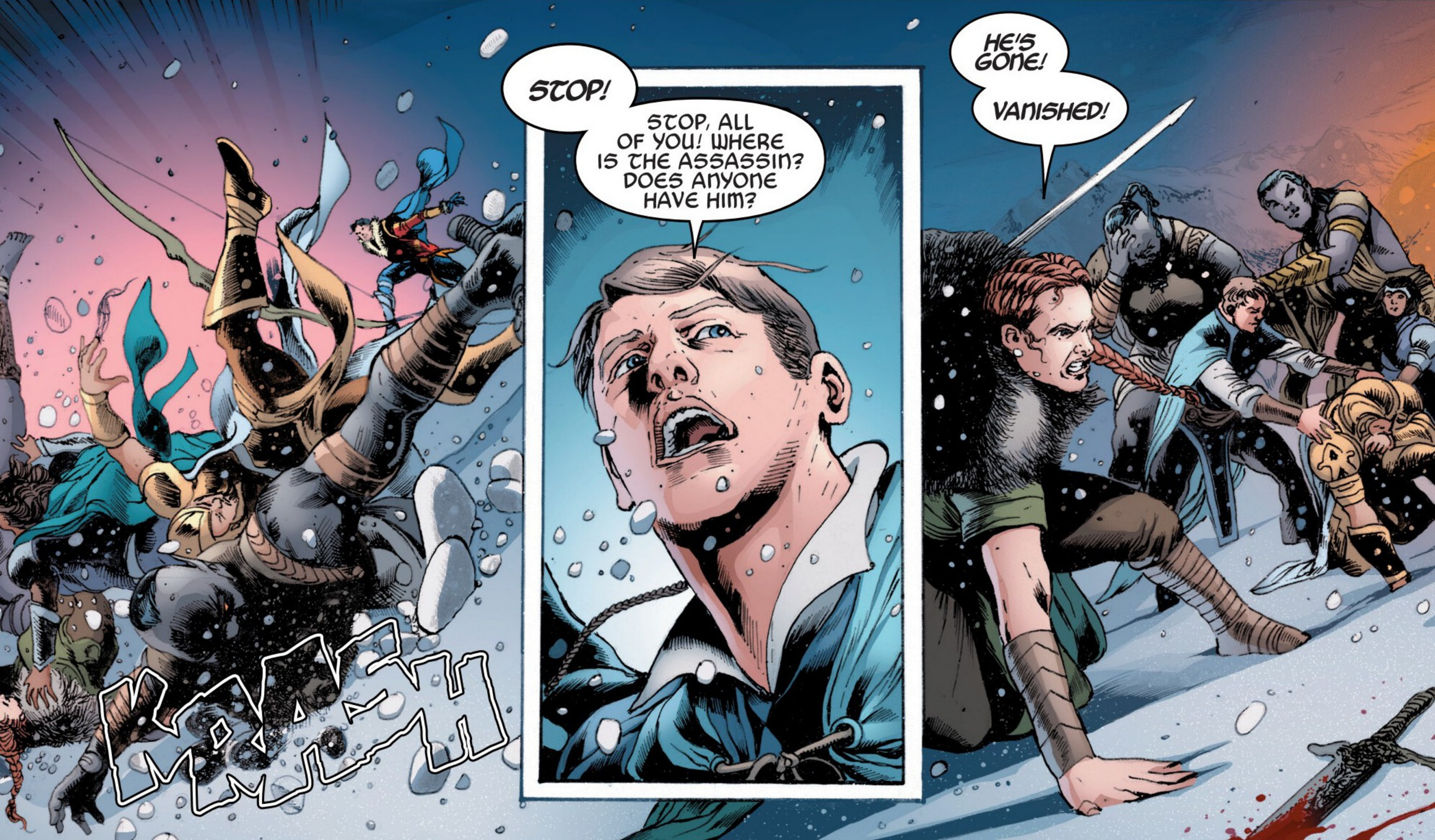
I HAVE LEARNED, IN MY TRAVELS, TO NEVER LET MY ASSUMPTIONS OUTPACE MY EXPERIENCE.
THE ASGARDIANS ARE EVERYTHING YOU WOULD EXPECT AND ALSO EVERYTHING YOU WOULD NOT.
SIMILARLY, THE DARK TROLLS ARE BIG, BRASH AND GUTTURAL-- BUT ALSO FUNNY, THOUGHTFUL AND KINDHEARTED.
A REMINDER, IF ONE WERE NEEDED, THAT THAT WHICH SEPARATES US PALES BESIDE THAT WHICH BINDS US TOGETHER.
BY THOR'S HAMMER, ASLAK, HOW MUCH MORE CAN YOUR BLADDER *POSSIBLY* HOLD?
DO NOT PRESSURE ME, GORM!
MEAD, WINE, LAUGHTER AND SONG... BUT THERE'S SOMETHING *ELSE* ASGARDIANS AND DARK TROLLS HAVE IN COMMON. WHAT IS IT? OH YES.
TYPICAL ASGARDIAN, UNABLE TO HANDLE HIS MEAD.

THEY DO SO LOVE TO FIGHT.
UNABLE TO--?
GOOD SIR TROLL, WAS THAT A SLIGHT DIRECTED AT MY FELLOW?
WHAT IF IT WAS?
THEN I WOULD TAKE GREAT OFFENSE, AND THIS DARK NIGHT WOULD TURN DARKER STILL.
GORM...
GORMLESS, YOU MEAN.
OH! OH HO! BECAUSE I HAVE NOT HEARD THAT ONE BEFORE!
I ACTUALLY HAVE NOT HEARD THAT ONE BEFORE. THESE DARK TROLLS ARE A SCARILY WITTY PEOPLE.
YOU ARE NO MORE THAN A CHILD.
YOU IMPUGN MY HONOR!
I WILL IMPUGN YOUR SKULL!
WOULD YOU BOTH PLEASE STOP IMPUGNING? NEITHER OF YOU KNOW WHAT THE WORD MEANS.

COME! WE SHALL DRINK TO FALLEN WARRIORS.
MAY THE BLOOD FLOW FASTER THAN THE TEARS THAT FOLLOW.
YOU. YOU HAVE LOST SOMEONE, YES? YOU HAVE THAT LOOK ABOUT YOU.
WE ALL HAVE.
NORRELL WAS A GOOD MAN.
HE WAS THE BEST OF US.
THE BEST OF US.
THE BEST OF US.
WE ALL KNOW LOSS. GRIEF IS THE ONE CONSTANT IN THESE LANDS, WHETHER YOU BE DARK TROLL, ASGARDIAN OR MIDGARDIAN.
WE ARE ALL SISTERS AND BROTHERS IN SORROW. A TOAST, THEN--

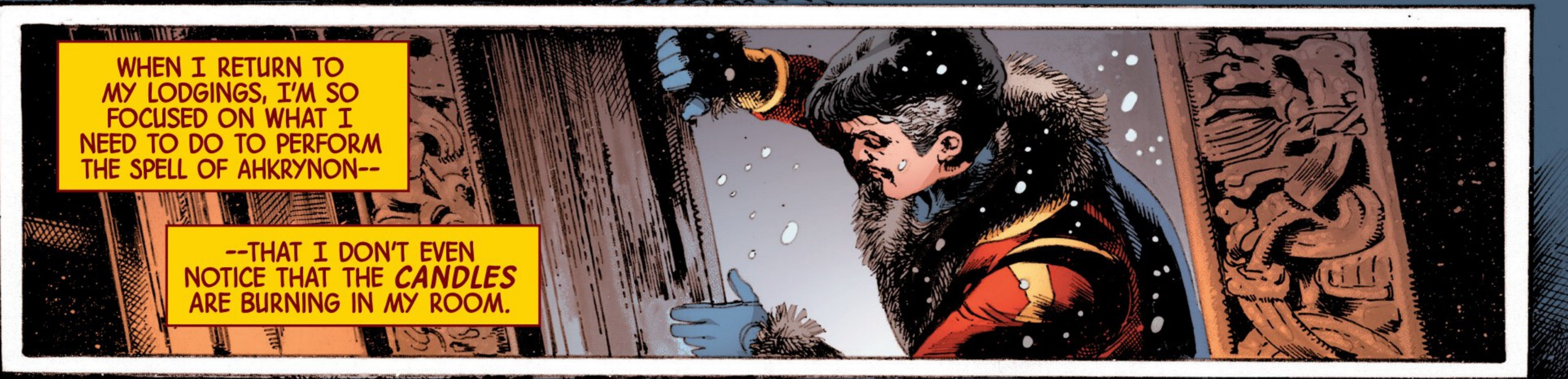
--TO THOSE WHO--
GUHK

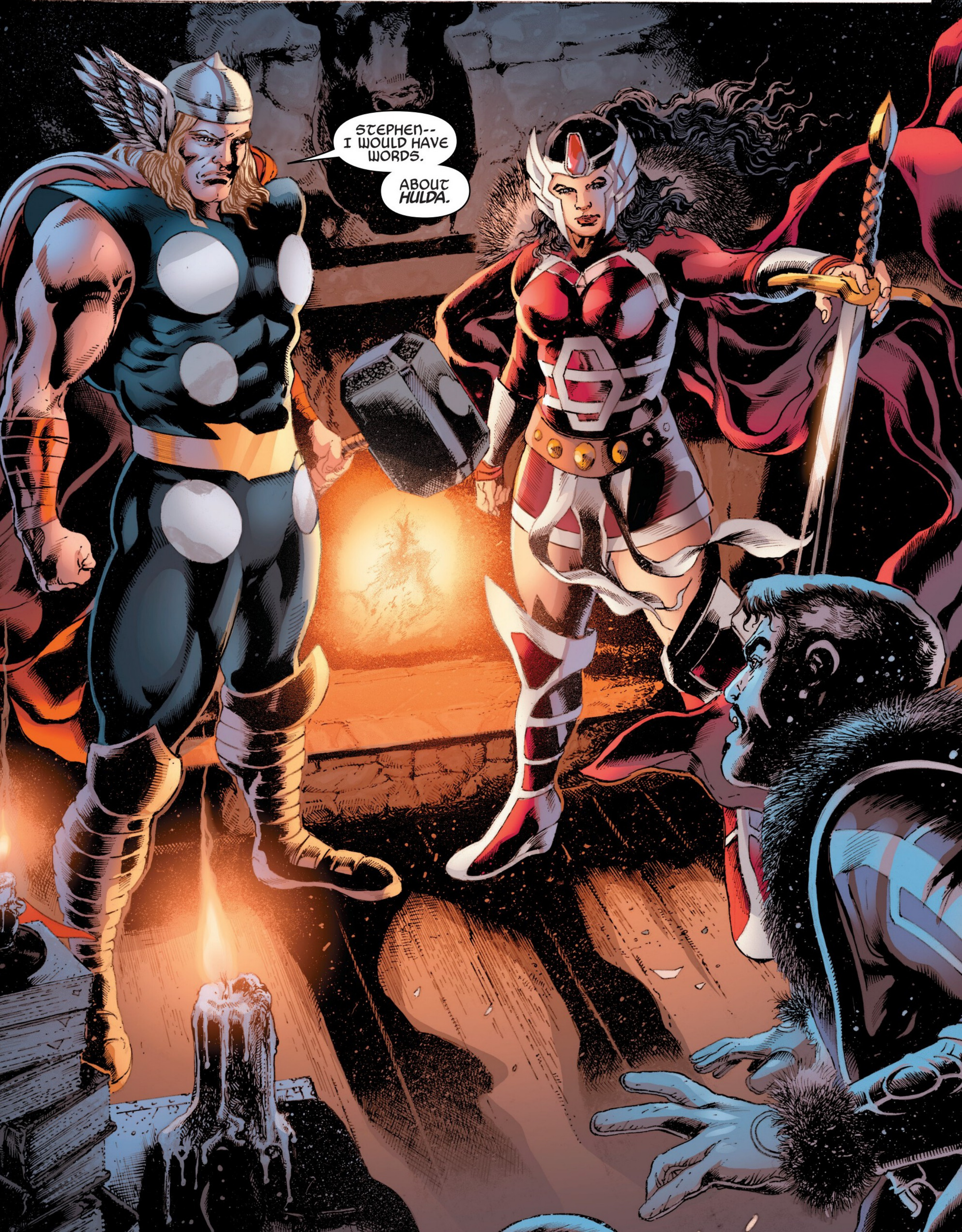

FIEND!


KRAAKH
STOP!
STOP, ALL OF YOU! WHERE IS THE ASSASSIN? DOES ANYONE HAVE HIM?
HE'S GONE!
VANISHED!

YOU! YOU DID THIS!
YOU SAT AT OUR FIRE AND SPOKE WORDS OF FRIENDSHIP, BUT THIS IS WHAT YOU WANTED ALL ALONG!
I PROMISE YOU, WE DON'T HAVE ANYTHING--
LIAR!
WE MANAGE TO DISENGAGE WITHOUT MORE BLOOD BEING SPILLED.
MORE OR LESS.
THEY HOUND US TO THE EDGE OF THEIR TERRITORY--AND THEN HOUND US A LITTLE BIT MORE--BUT EVENTUALLY, WE GET CLEAR...
...AND START THE JOURNEY HOME.
OUR PROSPECTIVE ALLIES NOW ENEMIES, AND OUR MISSION A FAILURE.
I DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TIME TO GRAB A SKULL.

I LIKED HER.
SORRY?
QUEEN TYRLAUG. I LIKED HER. SHE WAS A WARRIOR AND A GOOD LEADER.
SHE DIDN'T DESERVE WHAT HAPPENED. HER *REMAINS* DESERVE RESPECT.
ON THE OTHER HAND, WHAT ARE WE BUT *PILES OF FLESH* PROPPED UP ON BONE?
ONCE WE DIE, DO WE REALLY CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO OUR BODIES, SO LONG AS THE SOUL HAS FLOWN?
I'M... I'M NOT SURE I--
I TOOK HER *HEAD.*
I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT WANT IT.


WHEN I RETURN TO MY LODGINGS, I'M SO FOCUSED ON WHAT I NEED TO DO TO PERFORM THE SPELL OF AHKRYNON--
--THAT I DON'T EVEN NOTICE THAT THE *CANDLES* ARE BURNING IN MY ROOM.


STEPHEN-- I WOULD HAVE WORDS.
ABOUT *HULDA.*

4

I KNOW YOU, **STEPHEN STRANGE.** I KNOW YOU ARE NOT A MURDERER. I KNOW YOU ARE NOT AN **EVIL MAN.**
BUT I KNOW, ALSO, THAT YOU ARE CAPABLE OF GREAT ACTS OF DARKNESS IF YOU FEEL THEY WOULD BE FOR THE GREATER GOOD.
SUCH IS THE BURDEN WE BEAR, IS IT NOT?
LADY SIF, PLEASE TELL MY FRIEND WHAT WE HAVE FOUND.
HULDA'S **CORPSE,** BURIED 'NEATH THE TREE OF LIFE.
I SAW YOU DO THE **BURYING,** DOCTOR STRANGE. DID YOU ALSO DO THE **KILLING?**
I COULD SAY THAT LOKI DEFIED THOR'S EXILE IN ORDER TO SUPPORT MY BID FOR SORCERER SUPREME.
BUT EVEN IF THOR BELIEVED THAT LOKI WAS SOMEHOW COERCED INTO KILLING HULDA--
--TO TELL THIS TRUTH WOULD BE TO SHATTER WHAT REMAINS OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP, AND THAT IS SOMETHING I AM NOT PREPARED TO DO.
STEPHEN, DO NOT...IF YOU ARE CONSIDERING FLEEING, PLEASE CHANGE YOUR--
SO INSTEAD I **RUN.**

AND SIF FINDS ME.
AGAIN.
AND AGAIN.
TELEPORTING LIKE THIS, CHANNELING MY POWER THROUGH THE SWELLS AND EDDIES OF ASGARD'S VAST OCEAN OF MAGIC, IS EXHAUSTING.
I NEED A MOMENT, JUST A MOMENT, TO GET MY HEAD ABOVE WATER.

I CALL UPON *PERCEPTION'S* VEIL.
I WILL ONLY KNOW THAT THIS SPELL DOESN'T WORK AGAINST THE ***ALL-SEEING SIF*** IF THOR COMES ***CRASHING DOWN*** ONTO ME BEFORE I CAN THINK OF SOMETHING BETTER.
PHEW.
NEVER HAD ANY DOUBT.
MY CIRCUMSTANCES, NEVER IDEAL TO BEGIN WITH, HAVE PLUNGED OFF THE SIDE OF A THOR-SHAPED CLIFF.
NOW I AM SUSPECTED OF THE MURDER THAT I SAW ***LOKI*** COMMIT--THE SAME MURDER I SEEK TO PROVE THEM INNOCENT OF DESPITE WHAT I ***KNOW*** TO BE TRUE.
I HAVE CLUES, BUT I NEED ***ANSWERS***. MY TIME AS A FREE MAN, I FEAR, IS RUNNING OUT.
SO WHERE DO YOU GO WHEN YOU NEED HELP IN ASGARD?

YOU FIND THE NEAREST TAVERN.
THIS TAVERN IS **AWFUL.**
IT IS NOT THE BEST.
THE MEAD IS **RANK,** THE SMELL IS **EYE-WATERING,** AND I AM CERTAIN THAT THE MAN SLEEPING IN THE CORNER IS **DEAD.**
NEVER HAVE I BEEN IN A TAVERN OF SUCH **FOULNESS.**
HELLO, HOLT.
DISLOYAL AND ARGUMENTATIVE, MY FRIEND. HOW'S THE WRITING?
GREETINGS, GEIRROD. HOW FARES THE FAMILY?
I AM PAID A PITTANCE TO BARE MY SOUL. IT IS EVERYTHING I DREAMED IT WOULD BE.
ARE YOU ALWAYS SO **GREGARIOUS,** HOLT?
SOMETIMES IT SEEMS THAT WAY, ASLAK, BUT PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT MY APPARENT JOCULARITY IS MERELY A MASK I WEAR SO AS TO NOT DRAW ATTENTION.
AND THAT IS APPRECIATED, MARK MY WORDS. BUT THE AX--?
I SHOWED IT TO MY BROTHERS.
THAT IS THE AX WIELDED BY THE RED-ROBED KILLER?
THIS IS THE **AX OF EXQUISITE DECAPITATIONS,** CAPABLE OF ABSORBING THE MAGIC OF WHOMEVER IT KILLS.
IT IS ALSO VERY GOOD AT CHOPPING OFF HEADS.

SOME TIME AGO, IT WAS STOLEN FROM **HAFGRIM HARALDSSON,** A WEAPON MAKER OF SOME REPUTE.
HARALDSSON... I MAY BE WRONG, BUT I BELIEVE THAT **HULDA HERSELF** ENCHANTED HIS WORKSHOP.
MEANING ONLY SOMEONE OF EXCEPTIONAL POWER AND DECEPTIVE ABILITIES WOULD HAVE BEEN CAPABLE OF BREACHING THAT KIND OF SECURITY...
...SOMEONE LIKE LOKI.
HOLT, YOU WOULDN'T BE DISCUSSING MATTERS OF GRAVE CRIMINALITY, WOULD YOU?
WHY...*AH*... WHY WOULD YOU ASK THAT, GEIRROD?
"BECAUSE THERE ARE PAIRS OF ***THUNDER GUARDS*** SEARCHING EVERY TAVERN IN ASGARD AND TURNING THE DOORS TO SPLINTERS AS THEY DO SO."
I DO NOT SEE WHAT THAT HAS TO DO WITH ANYONE AT ***THIS*** TABLE.
I SECOND THAT. ON AN UNRELATED NOTE, IT IS TIME FOR ASLAK AND I TO LEAVE.

DON'T FORGET THE AX, MY FRIEND. I SHALL STAY HERE AND DRINK MORE OF THIS DREADFUL MEAD.
IF THE THUNDER GUARDS QUESTION ME, THEY WILL BE MET BY AN INEBRIATED SMILE AND AGGRAVATING-- THOUGH UNHELPFUL-- CHEERFULNESS.
I KNEW I COULD COUNT ON YOU.
MAYBE THE BACK WAY OUT WOULD BE BETTER? THE THUNDER GUARDS APPROACH.
MUCH OBLIGED, GEIRROD.
HERE IS THE PAYMENT FOR OUR DRINKS...
...AND THE REST IS FOR WHATEVER HOLT MANAGES TO CONSUME IN OUR ABSENCE.
WHO?

I AM NOT USED TO BEING SOUGHT BY THE AUTHORITIES.
GRANTED, THEY ARE AFTER *YOU*, BUT I FEEL A SUBSTANTIAL THRILL MERELY BY STANDING IN CLOSE PROXIMITY.
MY FINGERTIPS ARE TINGLING. IS THAT NORMAL?
I'M TALKING TOO MUCH. I KNOW IT. I APOLOGIZE.
I'VE JUST NEVER BEEN CALLED ON TO ***SOLVE A MYSTERY*** BEFORE, AND I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO TRY.
NOT THAT YOU NEED ***ANY*** ASSISTANCE! YOU ARE ***UNDOUBTEDLY*** CAPABLE OF RESOLVING THIS AFFAIR BY YOURSELF! I MERELY--
IT'S OKAY, ASLAK. YOU CAN BE THE ***WATSON*** TO MY ***SHERLOCK.*** I JUST NEED A MOMENT TO FOCUS.
TELEPORTING BACK HOME IS GETTING A LITTLE HARDER EVERY TIME.
BACK HOME? BACK HOME TO YOUR ROOM HERE IN ***ASGARD,*** OR BACK HOME TO--

--MIDGARD?
GAGGH!
ILLEGAL TELEPORTATION!
ILLICIT INTRUSION!
ILLEGITIMATE ARRIVAL!
WE HAVE INVADERS!
ALARM, *OFF!*
STEPHEN, WHAT THE *HELL* ARE YOU DOING?

UNNN... WHAT WAS *THAT?*
A NEW ALERT SYSTEM I'M TRIALING IN THE SANCTUM TO DETER UNWARRANTED TELEPORTERS. YOU SHOULD HAVE *KNOCKED.*
APOLOGIES, CLEA. MY MAGIC HAS BEEN THROWN SLIGHTLY OFF-KILTER OF LATE.
THAT IS DREADFUL TO HEAR, MY DARLING, BUT I'M AFRAID I'M IN THE *MIDDLE* OF SOMETHING AND I CAN'T STOP.
I'M ACTUALLY HERE TO TALK TO LOKI--
YOU HAVE *THREE MINUTES,* LAUFEYSON!
LUNCH THIS WEEKEND, STEPHEN? LOVE YOU!
THIS IS AN *EXCITING* HOUSE.
LIKE YOUR WIFE SAID, I HAVE THREE MINUTES, SO TELL ME THE GOOD NEWS BECAUSE I HAVE A SLAVERING HORDE TO GET BACK TO.

DID YOU STEAL THIS?
THE AX OF EXQUISITE DECAPITATIONS? YES. SO?
I NEEDED IT TO EXQUISITELY DECAPITATE SOMEONE. A VILLAIN MOST FOUL, IF IT MAKES YOU FEEL ANY BETTER. BUT THAT WAS MONTHS AGO.
AND WHAT DID YOU DO WITH IT THEN?
AFTER THE HEAD HAD DROPPED? I GIFTED IT TO A YOUNG SORCERER WHO'D RECENTLY IMPRESSED ME--YOUNG ASLAK HERE.
ASLAK? THIS IS YOUR AX?
YES. I THOUGHT IT WAS UNDER MY BED.
AND WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY ANYTHING WHEN YOU SAW IT IN THE TAVERN?
I DIDN'T WANT TO INTRUDE.
IT WOULDN'T HAVE OCCURRED TO YOU TO...?

HE IMPRESSED YOU, DID HE?
OH, YES.
NOT SO MUCH HIS ABILITY TO INTERPRET THE GRAVITY OF ANY GIVEN SITUATION, BUT CERTAINLY HIS PROFICIENCY AT ILLUSION-CASTING.
ILLUSION-CASTING?
TELL ME, ASLAK, WOULD YOU BE CAPABLE OF DISGUISING YOURSELF AS THE RED-ROBED MAN AND THEN TRYING TO KILL ME WITH THE AX LOKI GIFTED YOU?
THEORETICALLY? YES. ABSOLUTELY.
SO EITHER THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED, OR SOMEONE IS TRYING TO FRAME YOU.
FRAME... ME?
I VOTE FOR THE SECOND OPTION.
I'M SURE YOU DO.

FIRST, THE KILLER FRAMES *LOKI* FOR HULDA'S MURDER--
--AND, INADVERTENTLY, *ME* FOR THE SAME CRIME--
--AND NOW THEY *MAY* BE TRYING TO FRAME ASLAK FOR THE ATTEMPT ON *MY* LIFE.
BECAUSE WE'RE GETTING TOO CLOSE TO THE CULPRIT! THEY'RE PANICKING! WE MUST BE CLOSING IN!
CLOSING IN ON WHAT? WE DON'T EVEN HAVE A *SUSPECT.*
YOU DON'T? WELL, THAT'S DISPIRITING. SURELY YOU HAVE COLLECTED *CLUES*?
LOKI!
COMING!
THE AX WAS A CLUE THAT LED US IN A CIRCLE, BUT MAYBE THE *BROKEN DAGGER* HOLDS A SECRET?
BROKEN DAGGER?
THE WEAPON YOU USED TO KILL HULDA.
YOU *BROKE* IT?
YOU BROKE IT.
WHAT? NO, I DIDN'T.
TELL ME WHAT YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THE MURDER.

I WAS THERE WITH YOU AND HULDA. WE HAD AGREED THAT YOU SHOULD USE THE SPELL OF AHKRYNON TO BETTER ACCESS ASGARDIAN MAGIC.
HULDA WAS TALKING ABOUT YOUR MANY FLAWS, AND I PLUNGED A DAGGER INTO HER BACK.
AND THEN?
THEN I DID IT AGAIN, AT WHICH POINT YOU INTERVENED. TOO LATE, OBVIOUSLY.
YOU STABBED HER *TWICE?*
I DID.
YOU DIDN'T. THE BLADE SNAPPED OFF IN HULDA'S BACK FOLLOWING THE FIRST THRUST.
YOUR MEMORY IS *FAULTY.*
I NEED TO ENTER YOUR MIND.
I NEED TO SEE WHAT YOU SAW.
I BEG YOUR PARDON?
AND YOU THINK I'M GOING TO *ALLOW* YOU SUCH TRESPASS?
MY MIND IS A GLORIOUS THING--A THING OF *INTRICACY* AND *ENDLESS CUNNING.*
YOU WOULD GET LOST IN THERE, AND FOREVERMORE I WOULD HAVE YOU *SCUTTLING ABOUT* IN THE CORNERS OF MY CONSCIOUSNESS.
NO, NO. IF YOU WANT TO SEE MY MEMORY, DOCTOR, YOU NEED ONLY *ASK.*

WHAT LOKI SAYS IS TRUE. YOU ARE NOT PERFECT... BUT THEN, I HAVE NEVER TRUSTED PERFECT PEOPLE.
YOU *TRY*, AND THAT MAKES YOU ***WORTHY*** OF FIGHTING FOR ASGARD.
YOU SEE? I HAD JUST ENDORSED YOU, AND IN BUT A MOMENT, I SHALL--FOR WHATEVER REASON--MURDER MY DEAR, SWEET HULDA.
THAT MAKES YOU--
NO!
I SEE NO **BROKEN BLADE** DOCTOR.
YOU'RE NOT EVEN ***WATCHING.***
WHAT IS THE POINT OF...*HUH.*
ALLOW ME TO ***PAUSE*** THE PROCEEDINGS.

MY SHADOW.
YOU SEE HERE?
IT STRETCHES IN THE WRONG DIRECTION IN RELATION TO THE LIGHT SOURCE.
WE CANNOT TRUST WHAT WE ARE SEEING.
I WOULD WHOLEHEARTEDLY AGREE, DOCTOR.
THIS IS NOT ME. DO YOU SEE THESE IMPERFECTIONS?
I HAVE NO IMPERFECTIONS!
IT IS AN ILLUSION? THIS WHOLE MEMORY--?
NO.
THIS ENVIRONMENT IS A REAL MEMORY, BUT NOT ONE OF MINE. THE MEMORY OF THIS LOCATION WAS FORMED IN THE SUMMER.
HOW CAN YOU BE SO SURE?
THERE IS NO FIRE IN THE HEARTH, ASLAK. DO KEEP UP.
LOKI AND HULDA ARE ILLUSIONS CAST UPON SOMEBODY ELSE'S MEMORY OF THIS ROOM. THIS MEMORY OF ME IS THE ONLY GENUINE FRAGMENT OF THIS ENTIRE MOMENT--
BUT IT'S A MEMORY FROM THE MIND OF THE KILLER.
THEY'VE TRIED TO OVERLAP IT ONTO THIS...COLLAGE, BUT SOME OF THE DETAILS AREN'T QUITE WORKING.

LOKI? IF YOU WOULDN'T MIND?
YES, YES.
GIVE ME A--
AHHH.
HERE. IT WAS...HIDDEN FROM ME.
HIDDEN. FROM ME!
REMARKABLE. IMPRESSIVE. I SHALL SURELY COMPLIMENT THE CULPRIT AS I AM SLITTING THEIR THROAT.
MY TRUE MEMORY OF THE MOMENT HULDA DIED.
I HAD BEEN TRANSPORTED HERE, WHERE THAT FALSE MEMORY WAS FORCED INTO MY HEAD...
...AND THEN IMMEDIATELY TELEPORTED BACK, WHERE I FOUND MYSELF WITH A DAGGER IN MY HAND AND A SLIGHTLY WEIGHTIER CONSCIENCE.
SOMEONE WEARING AN ILLUSION OF ME DID THE STABBING AND LEFT ME TO TAKE THE BLAME.
I WAS TELEPORTED.
SOMEBODY TELEPORTED ME WITHOUT MY KNOWLEDGE.

WHAT ARE YOU--?
STOP THAT.
STOP THAT AT ONCE!
FOUND IT! A TRANSFERENCE SIGIL!
SOMEBODY MARKED YOU!
WHAT?
MAY I...?
OHHH, MY RAGE. MY RAGE IS BUILDING IN BOTH SCOPE AND INTENSITY. IT IS QUITE INCANDESCENT.
BUT HOW COULD SOMEONE HAVE MARKED YOU WITHOUT YOU KNOWING ABOUT IT?
THE BLACKEST OF MAGICS, BOY! THE FOULEST OF SORCERIES!
PROBABLY WHILE YOU WERE DRUNK.
DEVILMENTS AND BEWITCHINGS!
IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW YOU GOT YOUR TRAMP STAMP--
MY WHAT?
WHAT MATTERS IS THAT THE KILLER SWAPPED PLACES WITH YOU JUST LONG ENOUGH TO MURDER HULDA, AND THEN GAVE YOU A FALSE MEMORY THEY'D PREPARED EARLIER.

I'VE BEEN HAMPERED LONG ENOUGH. I NEED TO COMPLETE THE *SPELL OF AHKRYNON.*
I'VE BEEN TELLING YOU *THAT* FOR--
THIS ISN'T ABOUT BECOMING *THE SORCERER SUPREME.* THIS IS ABOUT STOPPING ANYONE ELSE FROM GETTING HURT.
GO HELP MY WIFE FIGHT OFF THAT SLAVERING HORDE, AND LEAVE *ME* TO CLEAR YOUR NAME.
ASLAK, I NEED YOU TO SEEK AN AUDIENCE WITH THOR.
THE *MIGHTY* THOR?
NONE OTHER. EXPLAIN TO HIM WHAT HAS HAPPENED. WHETHER HE BELIEVES YOU OR NOT IS IMMATERIAL.
AND WHAT ABOUT *YOU?* WHAT ARE *YOU* GOING TO DO?
I SNEAK BACK TO MY ROOM.
ASIDE FROM THE TWO LARGE ASGARDIANS I LEAVE SLEEPING IN THE HALLWAY, IT'S UNGUARDED.

TO SAY THAT THE SPELL OF AHKRYNON ***REALIGNS THE MIND*** IS AN INEVITABLE YET NECESSARY ***OVERSIMPLIFICATION.***
TO UNDERSTAND HOW IT WORKS IS TO UNDERSTAND HOW ***MAGIC*** WORKS...
...AND WE DON'T. NOT REALLY.
MAGIC IS A FORCE WE UTILIZE. WE HAVE STUDIED IT, LEARNED HOW TO RESHAPE IT, AND WE HAVE DONE OUR BEST.
IT IS ESTIMATED THAT IF YOU COMBINE THE KNOWLEDGE IN EVERY MAGICAL TEXTBOOK, TOME AND GRIMOIRE--
--FROM ***A BEGINNER'S GUIDE*** TO THE ***DARKHOLD*** ITSELF--
--WE WOULD PERHAPS GRASP ***EIGHT PERCENT*** OF WHAT MAGIC CAN DO.
THAT NUMBER IS UNDOUBTEDLY ***OPTIMISTIC.***
THE SPELL OF AHKRYNON ALLOWS THE MAGICIAN TO FIND THE COMMONALITIES BETWEEN MAGICS.
IT IS A RELATIVELY SIMPLE SPELL, ALTHOUGH ONE FRAUGHT WITH ITS OWN INHERENT RISKS. TO WHICH I SAY--

--WHAT IS LIFE WITHOUT A LITTLE RISK?

I'M NOT SPIDER-MAN OR DAREDEVIL OR WOLVERINE, BUT EVEN SO--
--NOT MANY PEOPLE CAN SNEAK UP ON ME.
THUNK
YES, I WAS FOCUSED ON COMPLETING THE SPELL OF AHKRYNON, BUT I AM NOTHING IF NOT AN ACCOMPLISHED *MULTITASKER.*
THIS SHOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED.
WHOEVER ROSKVA IS STRUGGLING WITH IS AN *EXCEPTIONAL* SORCERER.

THIS IS THE SECOND TIME YOU'VE ATTACKED ME IN MY ROOM.
THIS IS THE START OF WHAT WE CALL A *PATTERN.*
BUT I THINK WE SHOULD UNMASK YOU BEFORE IT GETS TOO *PREDICTABLE,* WHAT DO YOU SAY?
HUH.
OKAY, I'LL ADMIT IT. THIS ONE SURPRISES ME.
GORM?

WHAT? NO, THIS DOESN'T... WHAT?
THIS MAKES NO SENSE!
IT WAS ALL FOR YOU, ROSKVA!
I HAVE LOVED YOU SINCE WE WERE CHILDREN, BUT YOU ALWAYS GAVE YOUR HEART TO OTHERS. HERN, ONE-EYE... EVEN NORRELL.
BUT AFTER NORRELL'S DEATH, INSTEAD OF MY ARMS, YOU FELL INTO THE ARMS OF ASLAK. A SORCERER, OF ALL PEOPLE!
WHAT IS IT ABOUT ASLAK THAT YOU LOVE? HIS LOOKS? HIS INTELLIGENCE? HIS SENSITIVE NATURE?
NO MATTER. HE IS A WEAKLING, AND HE, TOO, SHALL FALL AT MY BLADE!
GORM!
WE MUST FIND ASLAK BEFORE--
ASLAK HAS GONE TO WARN THOR. HE IS FAR SAFER THAN WE ARE.
HOW DID YOU KNOW TO SAVE ME?

YEARS AGO, THERE WAS A MAN WHO FOLLOWED ME. SPIED UPON ME.
MAGIC RENDERED HIM *INVISIBLE.*
HULDA DID SOMETHING TO MY EYES THAT ALLOWS ME TO SEE *THROUGH* INVISIBILITY ENCHANTMENTS.
HE NEVER GOT CLOSE AGAIN.
I WAS PASSING, SAW YOUR ATTACKER CLIMBING THROUGH YOUR WINDOW AND--
FORGIVE ME, BUT *WHAT* ARE WE CHASING?
MY ATTACKER'S *ECHO*--BUT IT WON'T LAST LONG IN AN ENVIRONMENT LIKE ASGARD.
WE NEED TO HURRY BEFORE IT DISAPPEARS!
STEPHEN, MY FRIEND! YOU LOOK HARRIED!
HOLT, APOLOGIES--
NO APOLOGIES NECESSARY!

WE'RE TRACKING A-- DAMN IT!
IT'S GONE!
HAVE I RUINED SOMETHING?
THE DOCTOR WAS ATTACKED. WE WERE IN PURSUIT.
ATTACKED, YOU SAY?
BY A FURTIVE-LOOKING GENTLEMAN WITH A BEARD?
HE WENT THAT WAY.
OH, THIS IS RATHER EXCITING, IS IT NOT?
THOUGH... I'M NOT GOING TO BE CALLED UPON TO FIGHT, AM I? I'M NOT MUCH OF A FIGHTER.
OH, GOOD!
I'LL BE DOING THE FIGHTING.
WAIT.
I KNOW WHERE HE'S GOING.
YOU DO? THEN YOU WON'T MIND IF WE STOP OFF TO COLLECT SOME FRIENDS.

WE TRACE GORM TO *YGGDRASIL, THE WORLD TREE.*
GORM! WE KNOW YOU ARE HERE!
SHOW YOURSELF! *EXPLAIN YOURSELF!*
MY COMPANIONS' FURY IS TEMPERED BY THEIR CONFUSION, AND I DO NOT BLAME THEM.
GORM STRUCK ME AS A RECKLESS, ENTHUSIASTIC WARRIOR...BUT ONE COMPLETELY *UNTOUCHED* BY MAGIC.
SOLVEI, IVAR, HOLD.
DOCTOR--
YOU...YOU SAID ASLAK HAD GONE TO WARN THOR.
I DON'T... WAIT, I DON'T...

I'LL KILL YOU! I'LL BUTCHER YOU! I'LL--
NO. THIS DOESN'T...
YOU SAY YOU ARE IN LOVE WITH ME? BUT YOU ARE NOT. YOU CANNOT BE.
YOU LOVE ANOTHER, ALTHOUGH YOU HAVE NEVER BEEN BRAVE ENOUGH TO PROFESS IT.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M DOING HERE.
I HAD A DREAM, AND IN MY DREAM, THERE WAS ANOTHER ME, AND HE COMMANDED ME TO STAND HERE AND WAIT FOR YOUR AX.
YOU MUST BELIEVE ME.

WE BELIEVE YOU, GORM, WHICH MEANS HULDA'S KILLER IS SOMEONE WHO CAN CHANGE THEIR APPEARANCE--
--CONJURE FALSE MEMORIES AND IMPOSE THEM ON EVEN A GOD OF MISCHIEF--
--AND SOMEONE WHO CAN HIDE IN PLAIN SIGHT. BUT WHO? WHO COULD IT POSSIBLY BE?
ASLAK, WOULD YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS?
WHAT DO YOU--?
DAMN YOU, STRANGE!
GAHH!
I WOULD LIKE TO SEE YOU FARE ANY BETTER UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES!
BE ASSURED, I WILL KILL HER IF YOU TRY TO STOP ME.
ASLAK... WHAT...?
HUSH NOW, MY DARLING.
I DID NOT WANT THIS, I TRULY DID NOT, BUT MY HAND HAS BEEN FORCED.
YGGDRASIL, I COME BEFORE YOU SEEKING JUSTICE!
FOR TOO LONG, OTHERS HAVE SOUGHT TO STYMIE MY RIGHT TO POWER, FUELED BY ENVY AND SPITE AND A FEAR OF THE CHANGES I WILL BRING!

I AM HERE TO PROVE MYSELF, TO MAKE AN OFFERING WORTHY OF YOUR INDULGENCE.
ROSKVA, PLEASE FORGIVE ME.
I OFFER YOU THE LIFE OF THE WOMAN I--
MY LIFE IS NOT YOURS TO *GIVE.*
WHAK
IT IS A WORTHY OFFERING, ASLAK AGNARSSON.
BUT HE DIDN'T DO IT. HE DIDN'T KILL ME.
IT'S NOT YOUR *LIFE* HE SACRIFICED.
IT'S THE POSSIBILITY OF YOUR *LOVE.*

FOR **ASGARD**, MY FRIENDS!
FOR ASGARD!
ASGARD? I **AM** ASGARD.
A BOLD PROCLAMATION, BUT I'VE SEEN YOUR KIND BEFORE.
MY "KIND"? YOU KNOW NOTHING OF ME **OR** MY KIND.
AS A CHILD, I WAS MASTERING ASPECTS OF MAGIC THAT MOST SORCERERS WILL NEVER **BEGIN** TO COMPREHEND.
I COULD HAVE CHANGED ***EVERYTHING!***
BUT HULDA WOULDN'T ALLOW IT.
SHE COULDN'T ALLOW ME TO BECOME A SKALD. SHE SAID I NEEDED ***SUPERVISION. RESTRAINT. LIFE EXPERIENCE.***

SO YOU BURIED YOUR RESENTMENT, AND WHILE THAT RESENTMENT FESTERED, YOU BECAME *INFATUATED* WITH ROSKVA.
YOU USED YOUR MAGIC TO *STALK* HER. YOU INGRATIATED YOURSELF INTO HER FRIEND GROUP.
BUT THAT WASN'T ENOUGH TO MAKE HER FALL IN LOVE WITH YOU. YOU RECOGNIZED THAT YOU HAD A RIVAL--
--SO YOU COMMANDEERED THE MIND OF A *TROLL.*
YOU... *YOU* KILLED NORRELL?
IN MY DEFENSE, ROSKVA--
--I DIDN'T KNOW THAT YOU WOULD BE *IN BED* WITH HIM WHEN I STRUCK. I THOUGHT YOU HAD MORE *TASTE*.
I WILL CLEAVE YOUR SKULL--
UGH!
OH, PLEASE, MY LOVE. HAVE SOME *DIGNITY*.

HERE, ASLAK. FOCUS ON ME.
WHEN I FIRST ARRIVED IN ASGARD, THE OTHER SORCERERS TALKED WITH HULDA, DIDN'T THEY?
THEY KNEW WHAT I WAS GOING TO ASK, BUT THEY EXPECTED LOKI TO DEMAND THE TITLE FOR THEMSELF.
HULDA WAS CONFLICTED, BUT NOBODY KNEW WHICH SIDE SHE WOULD FAVOR.
AND AMID ALL THIS UNCERTAINTY, YOU SAW OPPORTUNITY.
YOU PREPARED THE FALSE MEMORY OF LOKI KILLING HULDA, AND YOU WAITED FOR LOKI TO DEMAND THE MANTLE--
--BUT THEY DIDN'T DO IT. THEIR SCHEMING NOW CLASHED WITH YOUR OWN.
AND AS THE MOMENT WAS SLIPPING AWAY, YOU PANICKED AND WENT AHEAD WITH YOUR PLAN.
YOU ATTACKED ME IN MY ROOM, AND YOU KILLED TYRLAUG TO PREVENT ME FROM SECURING THE SKULL OF A DARK TROLL.
BUT, NO-- ASLAK WAS WITH US WHEN TYRLAUG WAS KILLED.
A SIMPLE ILLUSION, YOU EMPTY-HEADED FOOL!
...HARSH.
ALL OF WHICH HAS LED ME HERE, TO THIS MOMENT--WHEN I KILL THE OVERRATED DOCTOR STRANGE WITH THE POWER YGGDRASIL GAVE ME.
"OVERRATED"?
ON MIDGARD, THERE'S A RHYME.
"STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK MY BONES..."

SEE?
BUT THIS ISN'T A *REGULAR* STICK, IS IT?
THIS IS THE *STAFF OF YGGDRASIL*--
WHAKK
KARR-RACK
SO TELL ME AGAIN WHO'S *"OVERRATED"*?
MY ATTEMPTS AT GOADING HIM ARE NOT *ENTIRELY* EMPTY--BUT THEY'RE *CLOSE.*
THE FACT IS, IF WE WERE ON EARTH, I'D ALREADY HAVE WIPED THE FLOOR WITH THE SMUG LITTLE $&#%.

BUT WE'RE NOT, AND ALTHOUGH THE SPELL OF AHKRYNON HAS OPENED UP A WHOLE NEW REALM OF MAGIC TO ME--
--I HAVE TO KEEP HIM OFF-BALANCE LONG ENOUGH TO ACCLIMATIZE TO MY NEW--
DAMN.
HE'S BETTER THAN I THOUGHT.
OH, THIS IS NOT GOOD.
YOU DON'T BELONG HERE, STRANGE. YOU DON'T EVEN WANT TO BE HERE.
YOU JUST WANTED TO TAKE ASGARD'S POWER SO YOU CAN RETURN TO EARTH TO FIGHT YET ANOTHER OF YOUR MORTAL DICTATORS.
BUT YGGDRASIL WAS NEVER GOING TO CHOOSE YOU.
TO BE SORCERER SUPREME OF ASGARD IS TO HOLD SWAY OVER GODS. IT IS TO BE A GOD.
ASGARD IS FOR ASGARDIANS.

YOU KNOW, YOU'RE RIGHT.
I CAME HERE WITH AN AGENDA, SO MAYBE THE MANTLE OF SORCERER SUPREME SHOULD *NOT* BE MINE--
--BUT IT SHOULDN'T BE *YOURS* EITHER.
ON EARTH, THAT IS THE VISHANTI. ON ASGARD...THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN YGGDRASIL, PERHAPS WORKING *THROUGH* HULDA.
YGGDRASIL HAS GIVEN YOU A SLIVER OF ITS POWER, ABSOLUTELY--
--BUT TO BECOME SORCERER SUPREME, YOU MUST PASS A *TRIAL* SET BY THE MAGICAL AUTHORITY OF THAT REALM.
BUT YOU *MURDERED* HULDA.
EVEN IF WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE, THE *TREE OF LIFE AND DEATH* CARES NOT ABOUT OUR SINS OR TRANSGRESSIONS.
IT'S A *TREE*. IF IT WON'T GIVE ME THE REST OF ITS POWER--

--I SHALL TAKE IT!
THE TREE SCREAMS.
AND ASGARD TREMBLES.
AND ASLAK DOES NOT STOP, EVEN WHEN IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT HIS ACTIONS ARE HARMING YGGDRASIL.

THE SPELL OF AHKRYNON IS MULTIFACETED.
IT REALIGNS THE SELF, REORDERS THE MIND AND TRANSFORMS THE MAGICIAN INTO A *CONDUIT* FOR MAGIC.
SO I TAKE THE POWER THAT THIS TWISTED, DESPERATE YOUNG MAN IS STEALING--
--AND CHANNEL IT *BACK WHERE IT BELONGS.*
I'D SAY WE'VE GOT FOUR SECONDS BEFORE WE'RE BOTH FRIED TO TWO VERY DIMWITTED CRISPS.
I'VE DIED BEFORE.
IT'S NOT SO BAD.

HOLT?
OH, HOW I DID *LIKE* BEING HOLT. I LIKED HIS FOIBLES, AND I LIKED THE PLAYS THAT HE WROTE.
I AM NOT USED TO SUCH THINGS, YOU SEE, FOR I AM A TREE, AND WE DO NOT WRITE PLAYS.
YOU'RE YGGDRASIL?
A FLESH-AND-BLOOD INTERPRETATION, YES. AND MY MAGIC IS NOT FOR ONE SUCH AS *YOU.*
SLEEP NOW, ASGARDIAN.

WHEN... WHEN DID YOU--?
I CAME INTO BEING WHEN YOU ARRIVED IN ASGARD, FOR I KNEW WHAT YOU SOUGHT.
OUR TIME TOGETHER HAS, OF COURSE, BEEN THE TRIAL **ALL ALONG,** STEPHEN.
MY FLESH-AND-BLOOD INTERPRETATION IS **SNEAKY,** IT SEEMS.
BUT I HAVE HAD SUCH **FUN!** CHOOSING TO EXIST FOR **SOME** PEOPLE, AND NOT EXIST FOR **OTHERS!** CHOOSING TO HAVE A FAMILY! A HISTORY! A **LIFE!**
LIVING AS THE **WORLD TREE** DID NOT PREPARE ME FOR SUCH **HIJINKS!**
MY MOTIVES WERE NOT--
I AM A TREE, AND AS SUCH, I DO NOT MUCH **CARE** FOR MOTIVES.
BUT **RETURNING** MY MAGIC INSTEAD OF ATTEMPTING TO KEEP IT FOR YOURSELF...
AS HOLT, I CAN APPRECIATE WHAT THAT MEANS. WHAT IT DEMONSTRATES.
AND TO TRUST IN **LOKI,** OF ALL PEOPLE, SHOWED A GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT THAT YOU WILL NEED TO MAINTAIN--
--DESPITE WHAT IT HAS COST THE **TEN REALMS.**
YOU ARE JUDGED WORTHY, STEPHEN STRANGE, OF BEING THE **SORCERER SUPREME OF ASGARD.**

AND SO, AS I TAKE MY MAGIC AND PREPARE TO RETURN TO EARTH TO KICK VICTOR VON DOOM'S TIN-PLATED ASS...
...I WONDER WHAT THE HELL HOLT MEANT BY THE "COST."
WHAT COST? I WAS RIGHT, WASN'T I? I KEPT LOKI'S INVOLVEMENT A SECRET AND ENSURED THAT LOKI AND THOR'S RELATIONSHIP DIDN'T RUPTURE.
I SAVED THE TEN REALMS.
DIDN'T I?
ASLAK'S WORDS ARE MAKING ME DOUBT MYSELF.
BUT EVEN IF THIS IS A JOB FOR A GOD, EVEN IF I AM IN OVER MY HEAD, I CAN HANDLE WHATEVER COMES NEXT.
ONCE I'VE SETTLED MY BUSINESS ON MIDGARD, I CAN WORK AT BEING THE SORCERER SUPREME THAT THE TEN REALMS NEED.
THEN I DISCOVER THAT THE WAY HOME HAS BEEN CUT OFF.
AND THAT LOKI HAS MURDERED THOR.
AND THAT MY JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN.

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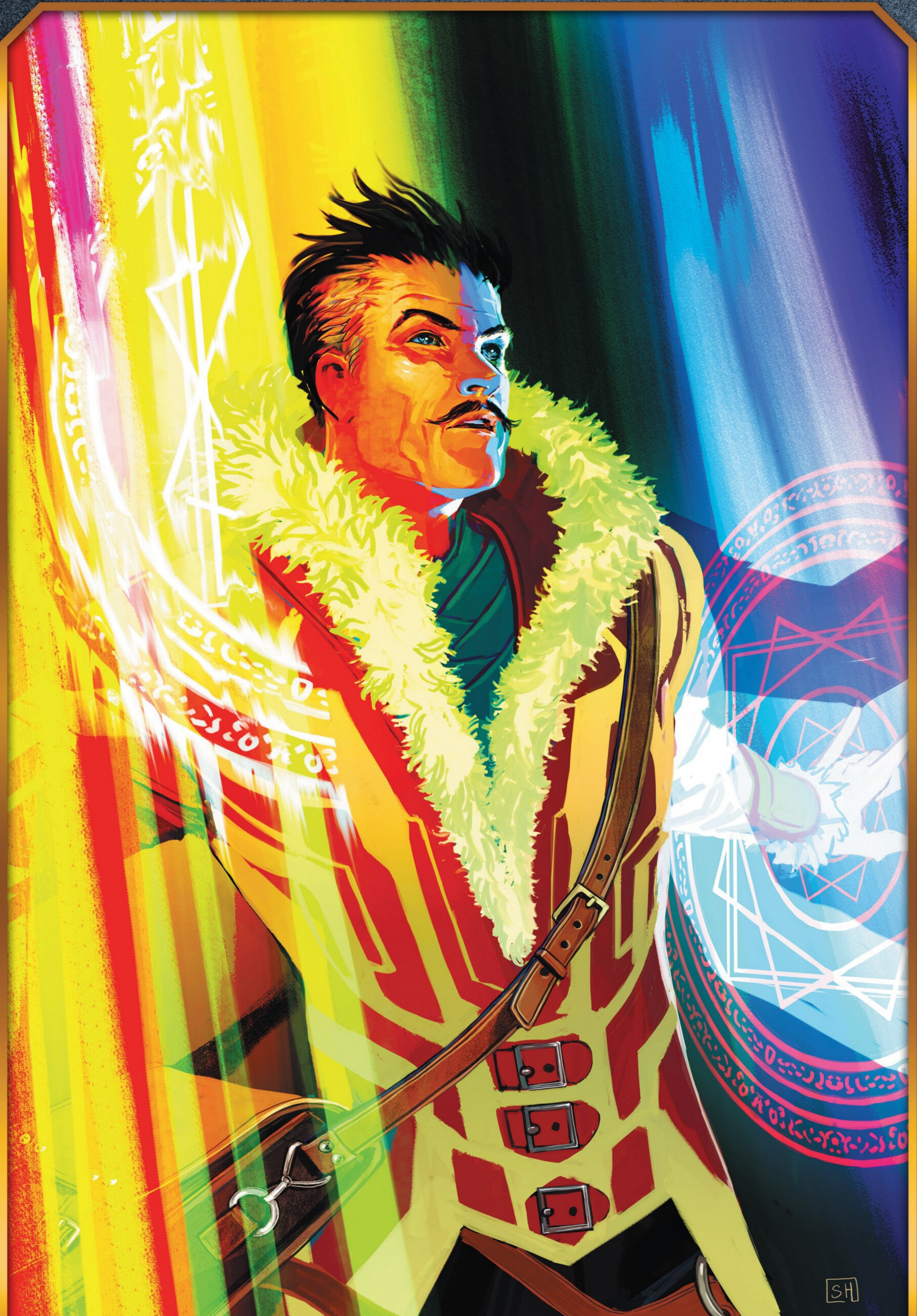

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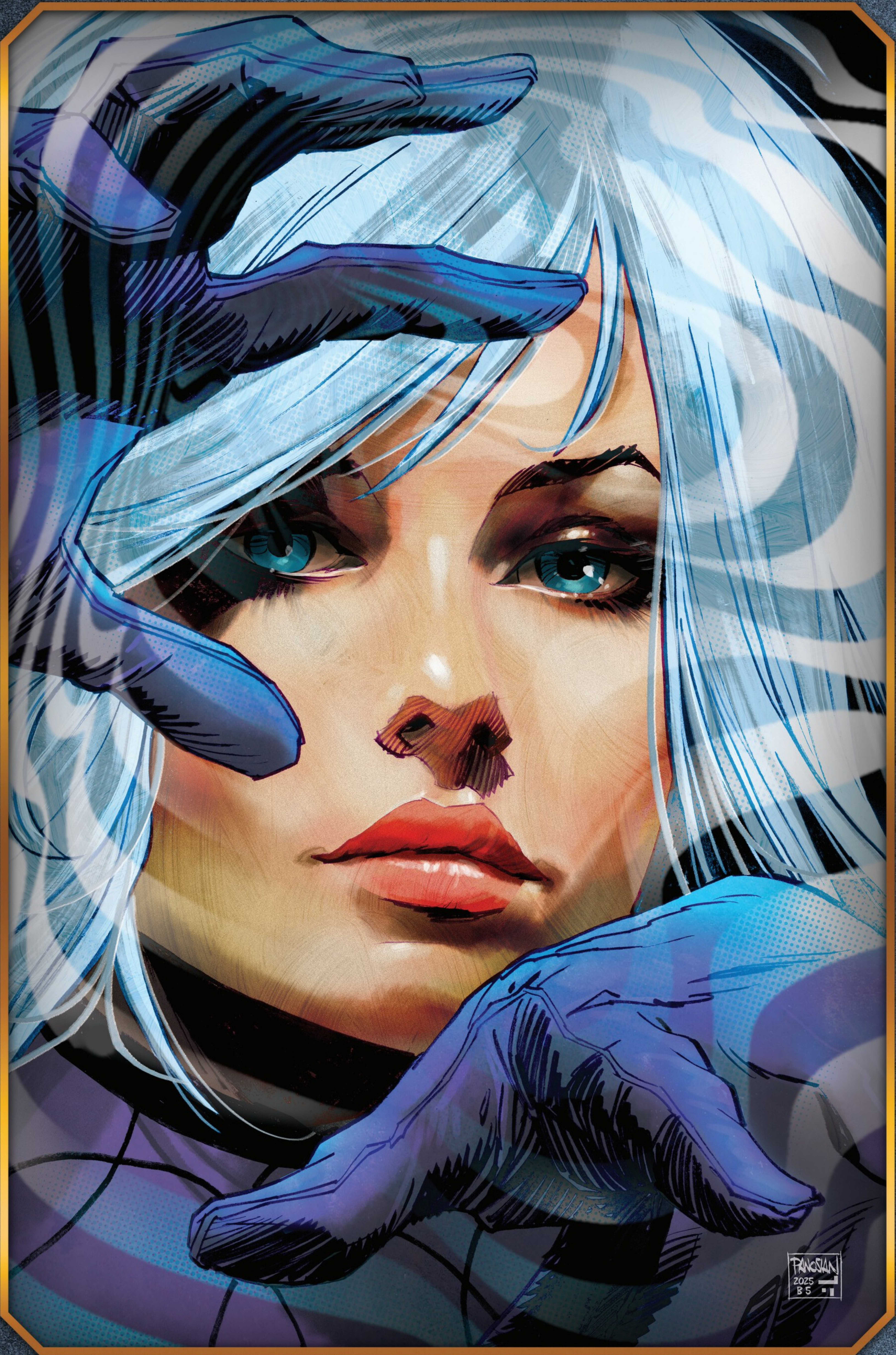
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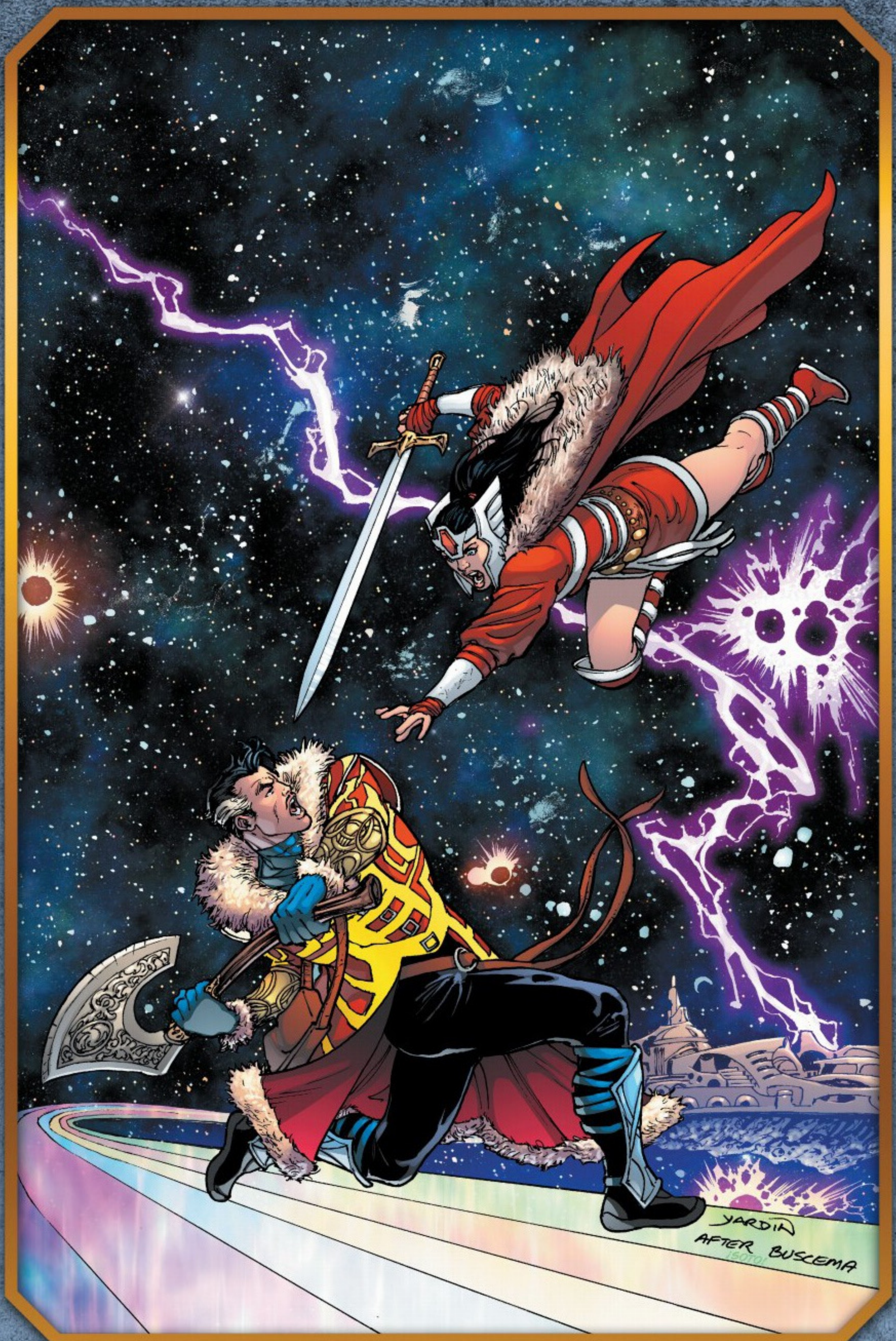
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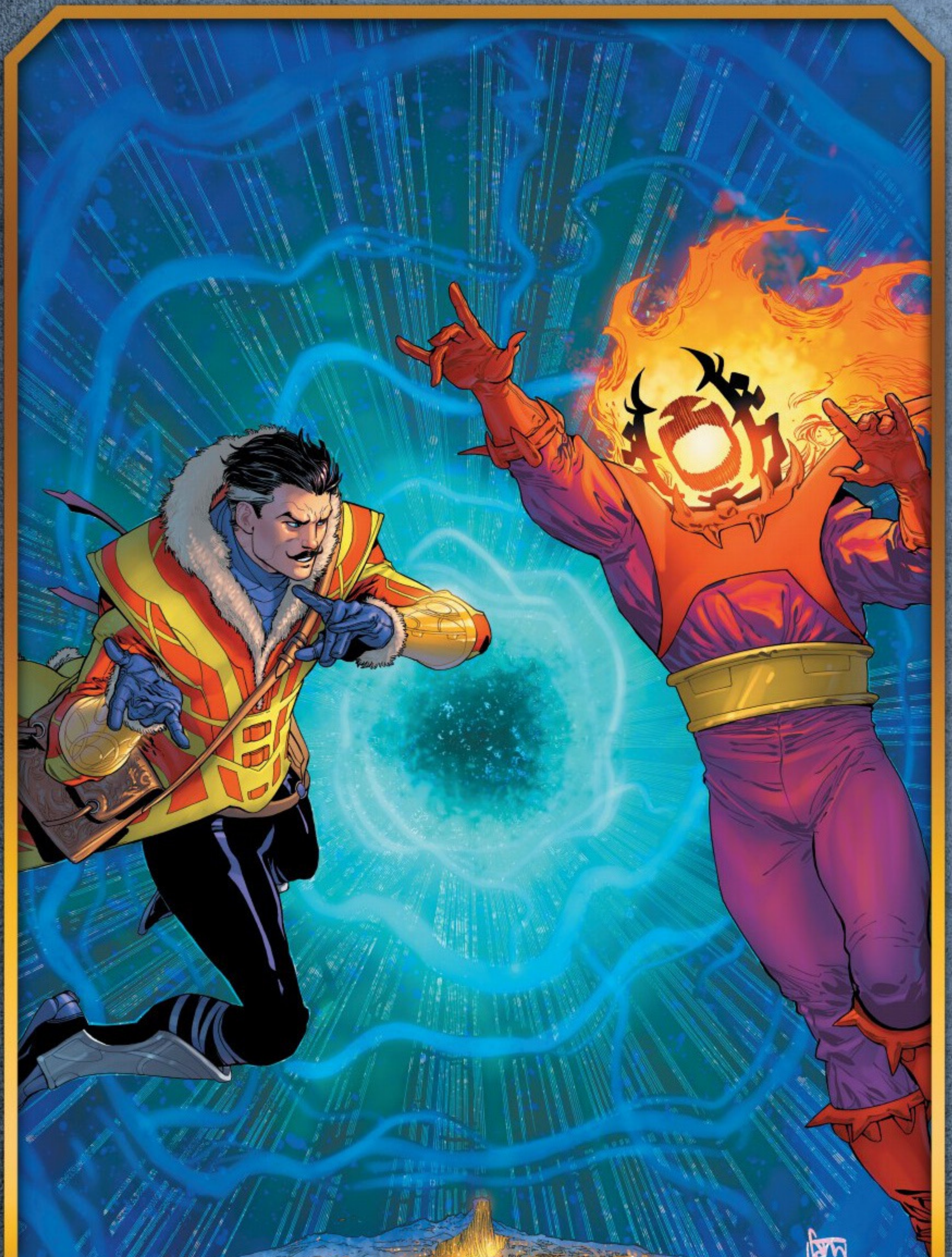

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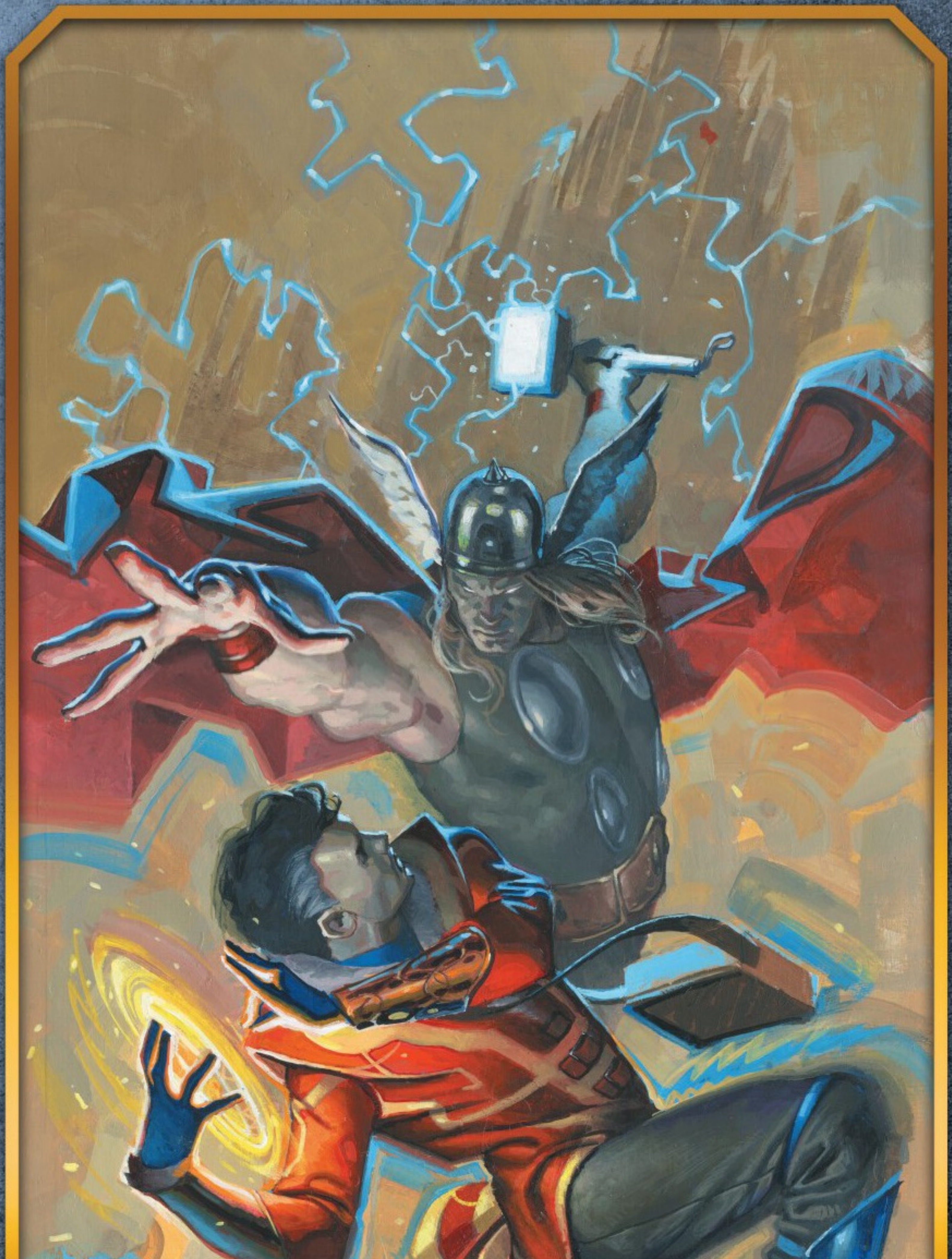

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